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RASPUTIN
AND THE
RUSSIAN COURT

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RASPUTIN
AND THE RUSSIAN COURT

By
CHARLES OMESSA

Translated from the French by
FRANCES KEYZER

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RASPUTIN AND THE RUSSIAN COURT

INTRODUCTION

Stranger than Fiction

THIS is not a novel, but a faithful record of strange things. During a recent visit to Russia chance brought me in contact with a certain person who played an important part in the glory and especially the fall of Czardom.

He talked to me about Rasputin, in whom I have been interested as one of the extraordinary phenomena in human nature. Through this person I became acquainted—in all its secret details—with the marvellous adventures of this mystical and rough Don Juan, whom a neurasthenic Empress aspired to transform into a Mazarin. This person even obtained for me from a former Minister—since forgotten, although he was once most influential—a copy of the formidable array of facts compiled by the Okrana about this bearded pseudo-monk. And I have thus been able to follow step by step, hour by hour, the strange destiny of this impostor, from the humble Siberian village of Pokrovskoie to the Imperial Palace, Alexandra of Tsarskoie-Selo.

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An historian depicting the heroes of past centuries may allow himself a certain licence ; he may by his well-directed imagination illuminate subjects that have remained obscure ; and in this way, according to his fancy, supply deficiencies and rectify discrepancies ; thus completing an *ensemble* that may come near to reality and satisfy his public. In the case before us such a thing is impossible. Rasputin's body is not yet cold, and the majority of those who knew him, upheld him or fought against him, are there to establish the truth if necessary.

Without hesitation, if not without regret, I have cast aside the numberless legends that have been gathered round the favourite's tomb, only retaining facts that could either be proved or be considered authentic.

I wanted to give the name of the person who so kindly helped me to procure my information, but he has asked me to withhold it. At least let me assure him of my gratitude. He will see that I have neither added to nor eliminated any of the remarkable indications he gave me, and that I have carefully kept to the domain of history, not allowing myself to introduce an atom of invention in the story that follows.

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CHAPTER I

Rasputin's Origin

THE small village of Pokrovskoie, lost in the Siberian *taiga*, recalls the hamlets of lepers in parts of the Caucasus, China, and Thibet. The inhabitants of this village are not victims of the terrible scourge that Xavier de Maistre has so beautifully described. It is even said that in the whole of Russia there is no healthier climate nor a place where people live longer than in Pokrovskoie.

Yet it is an accursed village. In the district of Tobolsk, to which it belongs, it is never mentioned without a feeling of horror. When a *mammouchka* wants to frighten her children, she says: "I'll send you to Pokrovskoie!"

Whence comes this detestable reputation? Surely not from calumny.

Pokrovskoie was founded about a century ago by a score of discharged convicts whom the Russian Government had authorized to settle in Siberia. Having found wives in the neighbouring villages, these peculiar settlers throve and multiplied. But they had lost the taste for work, and objected to cultivate the land. They therefore sought a profes-

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sion that required neither labour nor long apprenticeship—they became horse-thieves.

It was not an unpleasant trade. They soon became adepts at it, and their descendants followed in their footsteps. No one, in that immense Siberia, knew better how to throw the lasso or to more skilfully cover the feet of the stolen animals with straw and rags.

After one or two expeditions they returned with their booty to the village, and quietly awaited the horse-dealers. These came from all parts of Russia. They had "drinks" when a sale was proposed, "drinks" when it was completed, and they became in fact so much in the habit of drinking that life in Pokrovskoie was soon one perpetual orgy of *vodka*. Occasionally the police from Tioumene came to the village to inquire into certain horse thefts more sensational than others, but they withdrew at the first symptoms of public hostility. Occasionally, also, the peasants' tribunal passed a severe sentence, under pressure of the governor of Tobolsk. But it was never applied and the delinquents carried on their operations as before.

In this knaves' paradise Gregory Effimovitch, known later as Rasputin, was born on the 7th of July, 1872.

His father, a deplorable drunkard, had the most abominable reputation in the village for complicated and astonishing intrigues. He was nicknamed "Rasputin," which, in Russian, signifies "corrupt,"

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considered quite a glorious title at Pokrovskoie, where vice of every kind was the order of the day.

Gregory inherited from his father a tumble-down hut, a few acres of land, and this unenviable nickname, which he was eventually to make so singularly notorious.

From childhood he had a taste for everything degrading and dishonourable. Dr. Litchernoff, who treated him for smallpox, has given an extraordinary account of him.

"He was," said the doctor, "a fine dark child, with such an ardent expression in the eyes that even I felt strangely affected by it. Thickset, strongly built, a good liar, and brave enough, he soon became the terror of the district; and I remember how Father Alexis, the old priest of Pokrovskoie, used to give him ten kopecks a week to keep away from church on Sundays.

"He had no respect for either persons or things. One day he threw a little girl of fifteen months into the brook because she would not smile at him. The child was providentially saved from certain death.

"Strangely enough, three or four gendarmes followed him wherever he led, blindly obeying his most daring suggestions. Among them were Striapcheff and Barnaby, associated later with his unexpected rise in life, and who became mere tools in his hands."

When he was fourteen, after a particularly serious escapade, when with the help of his two satellites

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he robbed an old man of his purse after having nearly killed him, he received twenty strokes of the whip in the presence of the entire population on the market place of Pokrovskoie, administered by a cossack of the chief of the district. This public chastisement roused in him, from one day to another, one of those fits of mysticism that often recurred at a later date, and which never failed to astonish those who knew him best.

He began to frequent the churches and monasteries in the neighbouring districts with an assiduity that bordered on fanaticism. He was to be seen on his knees by the roadside murmuring incomprehensible prayers, lashing himself with thistles and nettles

"He is inspired!" was whispered on all sides with a certain amount of awe, and roubles upon roubles fell into the small wooden bowl that he conveniently carried with him—one of the accessories of his ostentatious and savage piety.

But something occurred that put a stop to his growing reputation as a holy man. One evening in one of his paroxysms—which were to secure him his greatest triumphs in the future—he assaulted an old beggar woman.

An inquiry ensued, but owing to the age of the victim it led to no result. But from that day he gave up the religious comedy he had been playing so profitably, and devoted himself more cynically than ever to burglary and drink. At this time we

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gather from the official register in Pokrovskoie that he was condemned for horse-stealing, and two years later for perjury.

Notwithstanding his abominable reputation and his disgraceful mode of living, he made the acquaintance of a charming girl in Pokrovskoie, Olga Chanigoff, whom he married in 1895, who brought him in dowry a cart and a pair of horses, a few acres of land, three thousand roubles, and an unsophisticated nature. It must be acknowledged at this time Gregory Effimovitch, called "Rasputin," was not unattractive. His large black eyes had retained that remarkable expression that Dr. Litchernoff found so difficult to encounter in days gone by. He had a very white skin, an athletic build, and an ardent manner that impressed women.

A year later a child was born to this couple— a girl they named Mariska; after another thirteen months, a second daughter, Zenia, and in 1899 a son, Michel Gregorovitch.

And Gregory Rasputin, owing to his wife's dowry, had become a carrier, converted the three thousand roubles and the land into vodka, and was only enabled to keep the cart and horses because nobody in Pokrovskoie had the heart to take his only means of livelihood from him.

One morning, as he awoke, with some difficulty, from a drunken bout that had lasted two days, he found his faithful companion Barnaby in tears at his bedside.

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"What's the matter, little brother?" asked Rasputin.

"I have come to say good-bye, my dear Gregory Effimovitch. Life is not bearable for me here any longer, I cannot find work. I have been offered a place as gardener in Tobolsk and am obliged to accept it or I shall die of hunger."

Rasputin rose and folded Barnaby in a long embrace and muttered in a hollow voice:

"I must become rich and powerful enough to keep you always with me, you and Striapcheff are what I love best in the world. Holy Virgin, give me the inspiration that will lead to fortune!"

And the two friends emptied a bottle of vodka in anticipation of the result of this appeal to the Virgin to unite them for ever.

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CHAPTER II

Gregory Rasputin finds his Vocation

"HULLO! Can the carrier Gricha Rasputin drive a poor priest numbed with cold to Tioumene?"

Olga, Gregory's wife, ran to the door in answer to this appeal from the street. Trembling from head to foot, notwithstanding the furs that covered him, a young man entered the vast kitchen, where an oak log was still burning on the hearth.

"The carrier Gricha is a lamentable drunkard, my father," said Olga, after having scrutinized her guest, "and you will be lucky if you can awaken him. Hark how he snores!"

She pointed to an enormous black mass on a mattress, whence came a terrible noise.

"Two days ago he returned from Tioumene, where he had taken a load of corn. He came back without a kopeck and so drunk that he recognized neither his wife nor his children. Oh, my father, it is no pleasure to live with such a mass of vice and vodka."

Paying no attention to this remark, the priest approached the bed.

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" Rise, Gricha," he commanded, in an imperious tone, " and harness your horses ! "

And with these words he struck him twice on the shoulder.

" Let me sleep, for the love of the Virgin," grumbled the drunkard.

But the traveller did not lose courage.

" I command you to rise immediately or I'll break every bone in your body ! "

Bewildered and suddenly awakened by this energetic language, Gricha sat up in bed. The priest's decided manner had tamed him.

" All right, I'll go ! " he murmured in a thick voice.

Five minutes later the sleigh was ready.

" And now for Tioumene, at a gallop ! " said the priest as he climbed on the seat by the side of Rasputin.

The night of the 5th of February, 1903, was bright and frosty. The sleigh covered the ground, thick with snow, at a lightning speed.

There was at first a long silence, then the priest spoke.

" Are you not ashamed, Gricha, of the life you are leading and of the way you treat your wife and children ? "

Rasputin shrugged his shoulders.

" I pay for the vodka I drink ! " he replied with a leer.

You have still to answer for your conduct to

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God," said the young priest, "and you should be ashamed at your age—past thirty—to be more ignorant, more unruly than a child of ten."

The carrier was furious.

"If you don't leave off insulting me, I'll throw the horses against the trees and there will be every chance of both of us being killed like dogs!"

"You alone, Rasputin, will be killed like a dog, because I am favoured by the Lord who protects me."

"All you priests say that," grumbled the drunkard.

"You have only to make the experiment. It is not priests alone who have protection from heaven. Everybody can become worthy of divine help by prayers and sacrifice. Even you could become the favourite of our Lord."

"What must I do?" asked Gregory, somewhat shaken.

"Nothing simpler. Go to-morrow to the monastery of Verkhotourié. When you say you come from Mility-Zaborovsky, from the seminary of Tioumene, the gates of this holy place will be opened wide to receive you. You will remain there a fortnight in meditation and fasting. When you leave you will be a changed man. Instead of the passing pleasures you obtain from drink, you will know the ecstasy of prayer. The troubles of this life will no longer affect you: you will work, henceforth, on a road fringed with roses and lilies, and wherever you go you will sow happiness and virtue."

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Zaborovsky's ardent words made a strong impression on his companion.

"You promise me all this?"

"All this and more, Gricha! Something tells me that a brilliant future awaits you."

A fortnight after this curious conversation, Gregory Rasputin returned to Pokrovskoie. His wife and children wore mourning, believing him to be dead.

"You are right, my beloved ones," said the carrier, "for he who returns to-day is not the Gricha you have known hitherto. Gregory the drunkard, the miscreant, has gone for ever."

But Olga, who did not dare believe in this rapid change, asked for further explanation.

"Saint Michael appeared to me, whilst I was in the monastery. He inspired me from heaven, and I am now the humble representative of divine virtue on earth."

Pokrovskoie still remembers this remarkable miracle. Gricha, once a disgrace to the community, was now imbued with religious fervour. He wandered from village to village, making mysterious speeches in the name of Jesus, the Virgin, and Saint Michael, and was frequently seen shedding copious tears kneeling at the icons and praying that he might suffer in order to be worthy of Paradise.

At night, by candle light, whilst his household slept, he would study holy books, only retaining the

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most obscure and emphatic passages, storing his mind with a peculiar literature, full of exaggerated descriptions of events that he did not understand, but which appealed to him through the mere sonority of the words.

This mystical period came, practically enough, at a time when Rasputin had most difficulty in meeting the daily necessities of life. As he declared that Saint Michael had commanded him to build a great church in honour of the Archangel, he found many religious spirits who considered it their duty to help him. He went, therefore, from house to house, from village to village, collecting funds for the building of this church.

In Russia the trade of " strannik " is a profitable one, as the Slavonic race is very charitable and kopecks, apparently, inexhaustible.

Little by little Gregory amassed enough money to enable him to extend his circle, and complete his religious education. He went to Kazan, to Kiew, to Moscow, making incoherent speeches to the people attracted by his personal magnetism, and returning from this journey with a supply of celestial inspiration. He was received in the monasteries where he edified the monks with his Christian charity and piety.

" He is a *Staretz* " (a venerable man), they said of him.

When he had solidly acquired this new reputation, Rasputin returned to Pokrovskoie, with the intention

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of remaining there and following the fruitful calling of a holy man.

He was, however, somewhat troubled by his home life, and decided to leave his wife and children. Therefore, although he continued to provide for them, he no longer resided under the same roof, but in a humble cottage surrounded by icons and wax candles, in an atmosphere of prayer.

People began to flock from all sides to this former demon who had become a prophet. Sinners, male and female, acquired the right, by giving plentifully in coin, to kiss the hem of his cloak and gain the good will of Saint Michael.

He was also consulted on the most varied and delicate matters. He answered like a sybil, in enigmatic phrases, which, in his own words: "Everybody could arrange to their own satisfaction."

Terrible credulity of a simple and futile people! The more obscure and dense were Gricha's oracles, the more profitable were they.

If a mother wished to know whether her daughter should marry, she consulted Rasputin, who in an inspired tone would proclaim:

"A good graft revives an old tree."

If a tradesman wanted to take an important step:

"Before crossing the river," the peasant prophet would say, "see that the ferry is in its place!"

And it was with these platitudes that Gregory satisfied his followers, who spread reports far and

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wide of the infallible gifts of the prophet of Pokrovskoie.

But virtue, although remunerative, at length weighed on Rasputin. He thought of a doctrine where inspiration could be combined with practices less commonplace and more suggestive than were current with holy men in all religions and all countries.

One morning he announced his intention of starting from the monastery at Argueff, whither Saint Michael called him to confide to him matters of a sensational and secret nature that he, Rasputin, would eventually communicate to all.

He kept his word, and a month later brought back from Argueff the grotesque doctrine that was soon to secure him glory, power and fortune, and at the same time a long list of physical and intellectual pleasures.

" I am now able," he would say to all, " to guarantee the salvation of every soul, as the Supreme Being has just transmitted to me a spark of His omnipotence."

In a few days the news circulated all through Siberia, and even beyond : then followed a formidable arrival of believers of both sexes, eager for purification and everlasting happiness.

Listen to the speech of the former carrier miraculously changed into the representative of the Lord on earth :

" All that emanates from me, my dear brethren,

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is a source of Light, where all can enlighten their conscience.

" God, the Father of all things, is not cruel to poor human beings; provided they show sincere contrition, He is ready to open His arms to them.

" But in order that there may be contrition there must be sin, unconscious sin after the manner of children who know not what they do, either good or evil. Sin brings repentance only when it has been committed voluntarily.

" Sin, then, my dear brethren, and our united prayers, in a great act of contrition, will bring divine mercy."

Numerous were the adepts who favoured this new cult that allied frailty with forgiveness.

Soon " prayer with sacrifice " attracted to Pokrovskoie all that was demented in Russia.

Mr. Verintsew, an inhabitant of the Siberian village, has kindly given me the following description of one of those memorable séances—

" At eight o'clock at night, when the stars are shining in the heavens—Rasputin poetically calls them ' the eyes of the Supreme Being '—the chief and his followers people the woods that surround Pokrovskoie.

" An enormous hole is made in the ground while Rasputin invokes divine protection. Then the hole is filled with logs and leaves, which the prophet ignites, offering a prayer to Saint Michael.

" Oriental perfumes burn in a small *casoulette.*

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Gregory throws handfuls of incense on the pyre, from which issue columns of smoke.

" Men and women seek each others' hands in the growing darkness, and are soon turning madly in a circle around the perfumed hearth. Little by little the rhythm and the dance are accelerated.

" ' Sin for salvation ! ' chants Rasputin in a minor key.

" ' We sin for salvation ! ' repeat the adepts.

" At length the ' faithful ' grow giddy. Occasionally one slips and falls, dragging others with him.

" ' Rise, my brethren,' commands the high priest. ' You have still to suffer.'

" And the dance continues, quicker, ever quicker.

" But the last embers have died out. Darkness suddenly encompasses this mad throng.

" ' Lord, we sin for salvation ! '

" Above the shrieks and sobs of the people, Rasputin's voice is heard, and a scene ensues that baffles description.

" ' Sin for salvation ! Sin for salvation ! ' is like a battle cry.

" At length the folly is over. ' I cleanse you of your sins, my dear brethren, and I bless you ! '

" The sacrilegious blessing of Rasputin closes the ceremony.

" Remember the building of our church," proclaims the practical chief. And roubles fall faster and faster into his coarse outstretched hands.

" Then, ashamed notwithstanding the merciful

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darkness, the adepts regain their homes across the fields."

It would be superfluous to add anything to this picture. Gricha, the carrier, had at last found his vocation, one that combined his vicious tendencies with his leanings to mysticism. Thousands of madmen were its dupes, others were on the road to become them.

Olga alone, his charming and sensible wife, was not deceived by his hypocrisy.

" I liked him better as a drunkard and without a kopeck," she sighed, as he passed surrounded by his doting followers.

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CHAPTER III

General O——'s Mysterious Idyll

AS General Prince O——, the Emperor's equerry, was returning from his daily ride in the Islands—the Bois de Boulogne of Petrograd—a boy of about ten years old ran towards him with a letter.

"I have been told to give this to your Excellency," he said.

The General unfolded the paper. It contained these words:

"A friend who knows what is threatening you wishes to speak with you. He will call to-day at two o'clock, and hopes you will do him the honour of receiving him."

At first the rider was inclined to ignore the note, and continue his way. But he changed his mind.

"Tell the person who sent you that I will see him."

General Prince O—— was a very handsome man, tall, fair, well built, the most captivating, in fact, of all the Czar's entourage. At this time he must have been about forty years of age. He belonged to one of the most illustrious and the richest families

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of the Slav aristocracy; he had had a somewhat troubled youth, had been married twice, and had a series of sentimental adventures that delighted women, if they lowered him in the eyes of men. He had a reputation for chivalry. A story is told at Kieff of how he remained at the bottom of a well during three days, in order to protect a woman from a jealous husband! And having paid this ransom to love, he picked a quarrel with the husband of his dulcinea, challenged him and ran him through the body with his sword.

Acts of this description made people famous in Russia during the old régime. And none could compare with General O——, since rumours were spread in the Capital and the provinces that his last romance surpassed all the preceding ones. That, in fact, the Czarina Alexandra Feodorovna had fallen violently in love with him, and—but why repeat the odious calumnies that a frivolous and old-fashioned court did not hesitate to imagine and circulate even about their sovereigns?

It was about noon when General O—— returned to his little house in the Moïka, a small but luxurious place that he inherited from his father and had furnished with the greatest taste.

"I am expecting some one here shortly, Vladimir," he said to his servant. "Show him at once to my study."

"And what if your Excellency has not yet finished luncheon?"

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"I am not hungry, and do not require food to-day"

At two o'clock precisely, an old man in a long woollen cloak was announced, his face almost hidden beneath a long beard. The General, who was arranging letters and documents, started at the sight of his mysterious visitor.

"Father John of Cronstadt!" he murmured, in a voice that trembled slightly. "What do you want of me?"

"I have come to save you, my son," the old man answered.

John of Cronstadt had played an important part at the Court of Alexander the Third. A patriot and a fanatic, his prophecies, sometimes trivial and commonplace, had always been inspired by the interest he bore Russia and the Romanoff family. He had greatly influenced the Czar in the Franco-Russian alliance, and it is said that the reception of the French sailors at Cronstadt had weighed less on Alexander the Third than a certain dream of Father John's: the Virgin Mary had appeared to him in a robe of three colours, which constitute both the Russian and the French flags, and she had said unto him: "There will be great battles where the sword of France will extend the Muscovite country!"

When Nicolas came to the throne there was an end to John of Cronstadt's influence. Philip, a French hairdresser, had the ear of the young Czar, and the Slav monk left the Court and retired to his

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province to peacefully enjoy the income derived from the generosity of Alexander. But his retirement was not of long duration ; an Imperial message soon recalled him to Petrograd, for the birth of the son so eagerly desired by Nicolas and Alexandra Feodorovna.

The General remained silent before the sharp-sighted monk.

" I have come to save you, my son ! " repeated John of Cronstadt. " A great danger threatens you, and likewise threatens her whom you love. Your secret is no longer your own, and those who are acquainted with it are thinking of using it without mercy——"

General Prince O—— stopped him with a quick movement of the hand.

" Enough, monk ! If you came here bent on intrigue, or for a wager, know that you have made a mistake. My secret, if secret there is, interests none but myself. . . ."

" That is not true, my son ! " exclaimed Father John. " There is at least one person whom your secret concerns, and you should, for the majesty of that person—you heard what I said ?—for the majesty of that person be more prudent and more willing to take advice."

The General, who up to this moment had been seated, now rose in a paroxysm of rage.

" You have said too much, accursed monk," he hissed, throwing himself upon him.

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But the Father of Cronstadt, notwithstanding his great age, was still uncommonly strong. He pushed his aggressor aside and quickly said :

" Read, child, instead of wishing to spoil everything by senseless temper ! "

The General seized the papers, looked at them, and suddenly becoming deadly pale, fell back in his chair without a word.

The monk moved slowly towards him, placed a benevolent hand on his shoulder, and in a voice that had regained its sweetness, said :

" I see you have understood me ! These are the copies of all the letters *she* sent you, and if I am not mistaken, there on your table, in that thick packet . . . Those who have sent me to you have the photographs of all the love letters she has written you ! No use will be made of them if you will leave Russia, and if you give me your word of honour you will never return. . . . If you refuse, the husband of this lady will have the proofs of his dishonour to-morrow morning, and as he is most powerful, he will know how to be avenged on her and on you. Choose ! "

" How dare I choose ? " General O—— remarked bitterly. " Those who have sent you have made their preparations with too much care to give me the possibility of resisting them. I therefore accept your conditions : I leave to-morrow, and I swear, before God, never to see my country again. But, monk, can you swear to me, on the crucified body

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of our Saviour, that the person in question will never be suspected, never troubled. . . ."

"I swear, my son!" solemnly declared Father John, piously kissing the ivory cross he wore around his neck. "Go without fear, without regret, nothing will transpire either through me or those who sent me. And she whom you love will continue to be honoured as the most virtuous of queens."

On the following day, General Prince O—— received unlimited leave of absence from the Czar without having had the necessity of applying for it—and left Petrograd. A few months later he was found dead in an hotel in Cairo. The trunk containing his love souvenirs had disappeared.

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CHAPTER IV

Some Details of the Russian Court

IN a preceding chapter I described the rôle John of Cronstadt had played in exile . . . in connexion with General O——. I will now explain his motives.

The Russian Court had just assisted, perhaps without understanding it, at the revolution of 1905 that nearly overthrew the throne. Two parties, equally powerful and equally active, had been formed: that of the Dowager Empress Marie Feodorovna (with almost liberal tendencies) in conjunction with the majority of the Grand Dukes and the friends of Alexander the Third's court. Around the young Czarina, Alexandra Feodorovna —*née* Alice of Hesse—were grouped all the partisans of the autocracy, all the admirers of German culture, all the adepts of a Germano-Russian alliance, all those who in the preceding reign had been obliged to conceal their political opinions and smile on Republican France, the Wittes, Frederics, the Beckendorfs, the Stolypines, and later the Niloffs, the Gaemykines, and the Sturmers.

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It is said that the Dowager Empress was not particularly attached to her son Nicolas. She often criticized his weak, underhand disposition, his want of decision, and his extreme selfishness.

" He is as weak as a woman, but not as sensitive," she would say publicly when speaking of him.

But if Marie Feodorovna was not so fond of the Emperor as of her other son, the Grand Duke Michael, who physically and morally bore more resemblance to her husband Alexander the Third, she had the greatest respect for the throne of the Romanoffs, and would not allow a word to be breathed against the Czar or his honour.

Let us recall the sad hours of the revolution and the abdication, and the dignity of her attitude. Far from remembering, at that tragic moment, the ostracism she had suffered at the hands of her son and her daughter-in-law, she showed herself more affectionate, more devoted to Nicolas than anybody around him, coming to Mohilef as soon as she heard he was betrayed and unhappy, giving him a mother's advice, and only consenting to tear herself from his arms at the express command of Colonel Khouzine, who had orders to conduct the ex-sovereign to Tsarskoie-Selo. . . .

Marie Feodorovna was bitterly grieved to see her daughter-in-law, Alexandra, embark on an intrigue under the very eyes of her careless, easy-going husband. The thought that this cold, haughty little German princess could bring ridicule upon

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him who had raised her to one of the greatest thrones in the universe, was exasperating in the extreme to the old Empress. Therefore she availed herself of the admirably organized police, and was prepared to do anything to stop an adventure that might become serious. She was able to obtain photographs of the letters in General O——'s possession, and cause him to be exiled.

Father John of Cronstadt was delighted to have a hand in this Machiavellian undertaking. He saw two possible results from it: to keep the young Czarina's attention fixed on her duties as a mother, she who was constantly menaced by sensational revelations, and deal a deathblow to the hopes that the German party had placed in Alexandra Feodorovna's support.

General O——'s departure was a great trial to her who had been so much attached to him. In a country where she understood neither the spirit nor the civilization, and afraid to acknowledge that a gulf, widening day by day, separated her from those with whom she had to spend her life, she had thrown herself heart and soul into this sentimental diversion.

And suddenly the idyll was over. In a few lines the General had told Alexandra his determination: "After a visit from Father John of Cronstadt I am forced to go into exile. You will never see me again. But remember, Madam, that I shall always cherish an eternal souvenir of your kindness and of your Imperial grace."

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The Czarina had thought of asking an explanation of John of Cronstadt, but she forebore doing so in fear of placing herself in the hands of a man whom she imagined, not without reason, to be one of her worst enemies. It was a very dull moment at this court, which was never considered particularly gay. Alexandra Feodorovna, interested solely in her trouble and her motherhood—the Czarevitch Alexis, who was about two years old, already gave cause for anxiety owing to his delicate constitution—remained day and night in her apartments, refusing to receive any visits whatsoever. One woman alone succeeded in being admitted, Madame Vyronbova, who was to play such a nefarious part in the inner history of Russia.

Anna Vyronbova was the daughter of M. Taneieff, director of the private chancellery of the Emperor. She had been lady in waiting to the Czarina, having married Vyronbova, a naval lieutenant. This marriage soon ended in a divorce, with the Czar's consent, after a violent scene at the Winter Palace, when the officer struck his wife in presence of witnesses. And the moment she was free she had resumed her post of lady in waiting to Alexandra, but without the title.

Anna Vyronbova was neither attractive nor sympathetic. She was stout and vulgar-looking, somewhat cunning, and had no distinction in either her manners or her conversation. At court she was called "the cook," and never was a nickname

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better deserved. But she managed to please the Czarina by her servility and discretion, and perhaps by the hatred she bore the Dowager Empress, to whom she attributed all her conjugal misfortunes.

At all events, during this sentimental crisis she was remarkably devoted to Alexandra Feodorovna. She had a camp bed placed in the Imperial chamber, and day and night was the meek and consoling confidante, gradually making herself indispensable to the Empress.

A great deal has been said about this strange friendship between two women so totally distinct, one aristocratic, cold and haughty, the other vulgar, communicative and exasperatingly common. It must, however, be remembered that the Empress Alexandra always belonged to the " opposition " ; all who were condemned by public opinion, all who were hated in Russia, were always well received by her. It was only necessary to be in disgrace to gain her favour. And thus she kept Anna Vyronbova, in defiance of adverse criticism, as later in the same way she protected Sturmer and Protopotoff.

That morning, Anna Vyronbova came to her mistress, her eyes full of tears.

" Has your Majesty seen the sad news ? " she asked.

Alexandra Feodorovna turned towards her.

" You know, dear Anna, that I have not read a newspaper for months."

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" Then, your Majesty, look at this, in this morning's *Novoie Vremia* ! "

And she handed the paper to the Czarina, that contained the following information :

" Cairo. Yesterday General Prince O——, late equerry to the Emperor of Russia, died suddenly at the Hotel A—— At the inquest, after medical examination, it was stated that death was due to natural causes. Nevertheless, a trunk, containing important documents, has disappeared."

Alexandra Feodorovna fainted.

When she regained consciousness Anna Vyronbova stood beside her, crying bitterly.

" Swear to me, my dear Anna, that you will never leave me, and that you will protect me to the end against the assassins that surround me ! " murmured the Czarina.

" I swear, your Majesty ; and if one day I could help to avenge you I beg of you to count on your servant."

* * * * *

It was just about this time that Father John of Cronstadt left the Winter Palace with the monk Illiodor, another fanatic whose brutality pleased Nicolas the Second, and who had become known through certain predictions, unfortunately substantiated by the Russo-Japanese War, and the disaster at Tsonshima.

" General O——'s death," said John of Cronstadt,

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" will be much commented upon, and I am sure that the Czarina will accuse me of it."

Illiodor, the monk, looked at his companion somewhat sceptically and maliciously.

" Appearances are often deceptive ! " he murmured in a sententiously ironical voice.

John of Cronstadt frowned.

" I swear before Christ, Illiodor Maximovitch, that I had absolutely nothing to do with this senseless crime—because I am convinced that crime it is—and if I knew the murderers I would not hesitate to denounce them."

A long silence ensued.

Then Father John continued, more to himself than to the monk at his side :

" A trunk containing important documents has disappeared. I have no doubt as to the nature of those documents. . . . But who had any interest in obtaining them ? Certainly not Marie Feodorovna, who has the photographs."

Here Illiodor interrupted him.

" Did not General O—— have certain military papers in this trunk, that might tempt some foreign power ? Would it be the first time that Germany . . ."

John of Cronstadt stopped him brusquely.

" Without intending it, you have perhaps put your finger on the guilty party, my dear Illiodor. Germany has always played a nefarious part in the troubles of our poor country. May it please Heaven

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that her part may not be still greater in the catastrophes I shortly foresee ! "

Illiodor shrugged his shoulders.

" Do not forget that there are three times as many people in Russia, and that it is much stronger than Germany. What have we to fear from a power whose back we can break with a snap of the fingers ? "

Father John smiled, as though unconvinced.

" The day Germany wishes to subjugate us, she will not do so with either her soldiers or her guns. She will beat us with our own forces turned against ourselves. And the victories she will obtain will be called Ignorance, Credulity, Discord, Cupidity and Treason ! "

" You do not understand ! " said Illiodor.

" God grant that you may never have to understand ! "

What the outcome of this incident was we shall see.

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CHAPTER V

Rasputin takes Society by Storm

GREGORY RASPUTIN looked philosophically on the growing success of his lucky industry.

But it would be unjust to accuse him of ingratitude towards those who had been his companions in the past. This *parvenu* did not forget those who knew him in his bad times. Thanks to his generosity his wife, Olga—with whom he had ceased all intercourse—lived the life of a rich widow, and brought up her son and two daughters in comfort. Barnaby, the gardener, hastily summoned to Pokrovskoie, found himself raised to the post of Grand Master of the Ceremonies in the new Church founded by Gricha, introducing the visitors of note, and gauging their importance at a glance made the chief understand the tariff to apply to them.

As to Striapcheff, who, like Barnaby, had been the companion of his youth and Rasputin's accomplice on more than one occasion, he became secretary and business manager. He kept watch over the holy man and his affairs, invested his money, and generally looked after his interests.

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In April, 1904, during a pilgrimage to Kazan, Rasputin came across Madame Lydia Bachmakow, with several of her followers.

She was an amiable woman, over forty, who complained to everybody of being misunderstood and having never been in love. At twenty she married an honest commonplace merchant, who, not having succeeded in pleasing her from a sentimental point of view, nevertheless did the best he could by leaving her a large fortune at his death, and was possibly happy enough to have seen the last of a woman who lived so much in the clouds.

A widow and a millionaire, Madame Bachmakow, who in what she called her "long conjugal martyrdom," had made an inexhaustible provision of affection, became a passionate devotee. She went from convent to pilgrimage, feverishly and melancholically, lavishly squandering her money in offerings, buying a golden crown for Saint Isaac, a bracelet set with emeralds for the black Virgin of Kieff, a diamond necklace for Saint Marie of Moscow. . . .

She took part in every religious solemnity, in every ecclesiastical ceremony, multiplying her acts of piety, submitting herself to the most severe penance, observing the hardest of rules, without ever having found satisfaction, notwithstanding all her generosity and Christian resignation.

Rasputin came to her at this psychological moment, when tired and disappointed she thought perhaps of changing her way of living.

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The original doctrine immediately appealed to her, because she understood.

"Sin for salvation!" proclaimed the cynical innovator, "and the gates of Paradise shall be opened to you!"

Madame Bachmakow had never dared dream of such a wonderful creed, and it seemed to her as if Gricha's doctrine had been expressly made for her benefit.

It was a providential piece of luck for the ex-carrier, and one that he took care to make the most of. The lady had become enthusiastic over the brilliant qualities of the new religion, and over him who preached them. She returned with him to Pokrovskoie in a magnificent motor car, which she had presented to the holy man.

"The true prophets went on foot!" remarked Olga, as the luxurious carriage rolled by.

Striapcheff and Barnaby, as devoted collaborators of Rasputin, immediately saw the advantages to be derived from this incandescent Lydia Bachmakow. And a ridiculous comedy ensued.

One morning, as Gregory and Madame Bachmakow were conversing, Barnaby came upon the scene looking sad and sorrowful.

"Venerable master!" he said to Rasputin, "I have come to ask your permission to leave you."

The chief pretended to be most surprised.

"What?" he exclaimed, "you really mean it? You, my best disciple and my most faithful friend?"

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" It must be ! " answered Barnaby in a low voice. " I can no longer be a party to the ruin of your cult. A woman—I ask your pardon, Madame, for expressing myself in this manner—a woman has taken possession of you without understanding the harm she is doing you. One by one our ' sisters ' desert the temple and curse your name. Soon there will be none left beside you but that unfortunate misguided being who fails to see the trouble she is causing. . . ."

Rasputin raised his stick.

" Be off ! Go, if you wish to, you vile hound, you who think you can influence me by mercenary matters. I am the Chosen of the Lord, and I accomplish my destiny without a thought for those who follow me. What matters if all forsake me ! Was not John betrayed before me ! "

As was to be imagined, this scene made a great impression on Madame Bachmakow. The next day Striapcheff repeated it in another form. Finally, after a few more grotesque scenes that would have been understood by anybody but this credulous widow, the three confederates achieved their object. The tender-hearted Lydia took all the expenses of the community upon herself, and promised Gregory a large income, only asking, in return, to be allowed to follow the chief wherever he went, and to work for his greater glory.

Shortly afterwards Rasputin left Pokrovskoie, which was now far too small to satisfy his ambitions.

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Madame Bachmakow approved his decision. She was eager to introduce " her " prophet to the whole of Russia.

The tour began by Kazan. Under the patronage of the millionaire widow, every door was thrown open to the " chosen of the Lord." It must be acknowledged that the ex-carrier acquitted himself remarkably well on his débût in Society. He showed so much contempt for " good manners," that his hosts were satisfied this afforded an incontestable proof of sanctity. He ignored the elementary rules of good breeding, disdaining the use of a fork, and eating with his fingers, like a badly-behaved child.

" He is an apostle of the primitive period ! " said Madame Bachmakow in ecstasy.

Proof of his charlatanism and hypocrisy were to be found in the fact that he expounded his theory of " prayer followed by sacrifice " at Kazan with the utmost circumspection. He was no doubt chary of frightening his new clients with the practices of his creed. He therefore contented himself with spiritual rites in which Striapcheff and Barnaby discreetly and opportunely assisted him, with magnetic experiments with Madame Bachmakow, an exceptional " medium," and with emphatic and obscure prophecies that could be interpreted in a hundred different ways.

It was at Kazan that Rasputin first met Sturmer, who was at this time Inspector-General at the Ministry of the Interior.

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" You will be successful and will attain the highest rank ! " the chief remarked to him.

He had said exactly the same thing the year before to Vladimir Gotcheff, an abominable scoundrel in Pokrovskoie whom he honoured with his friendship. And Vladimir was condemned to death for murder and hung shortly afterwards.

" I said he would be placed above everybody ! " said Rasputin triumphantly.

From Kazan the inspired procession went to Kiew. There Gregory, escaping from the jealous care of Madame Bachmakow, fell in love with a certain Kheone Goussova, whose tragic adventure will be told later on. For a month, forgetful of all his plans, the prophet devoted himself entirely to his new " sister." But Striapcheff and Barnaby were watching.

" Petrograd awaits you, dear Gricha ! " they constantly repeated to him; " it is only there that you will find a field worthy of your talent."

At length Rasputin allowed himself to be influenced, and on the 5th of December, 1904, he entered the Capital.

Rasputin was not unknown in Petrograd. Madame Bachmakow had advertised her chief in a first-class manner. Writing to all her friends about the exploits of this marvellous Siberian Cagliostro, informing Bishop Hermogene, John of Cronstadt's father, the monk Illiodor—with all of whom she had become acquainted during her religious peregrina-

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tions—telling them of the merits of the holy man and inviting them to come and satisfy themselves as to his " divine inspiration."

Even the press had not been overlooked. Frequent communications had enlightened the public about the deeds and movements of the Innovator. Take, for example, this article that appeared on July 27th, 1904, in one of the biggest newspapers in Petrograd.

" The venerable Gregory seems to be, *par excellence*, a true ' chosen of the Lord.' The son of poor peasants of Siberia, he has worked extraordinary miracles in Moscow, Kiew, Odessa, Kazan, that have evoked astonishment and admiration. The future has no mystery for him ; he knows all that will happen to-morrow, next year, in ten years, in ten centuries. His gaze is incomparably powerful, and the will power that emanates from it has irresistible strength.

" The venerable Gregory has effected marvellous cures. He has but to lay his hands upon the portion of the body that is attacked for it to be cured immediately. He has, in this manner, restored sight to the blind and movements to the paralytic.

" He is specially the providence of women, whom he purifies and consoles in the name of the Supreme Being. He visits the bathing establishments and brings the holy word to those who bathe. He prays with them, calling down blessings on their souls, and

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when they leave the baths they are not only physically but morally cleansed.

" We shall soon have the great honour of receiving the venerable Gregory in Petersburg. He has been ardently appealed to, and we hope he will grant our request.

" Let us add, that with admirable Christian humility and filial piety, the ' *Staretz* ' Gregory has never consented to abandon his father's abominable nickname of ' Rasputin.' By his virtues and his sanctity the son has made it a glorious title."

The results of such an advertisement may be imagined.

Over two thousand " believers " were at the station to receive the " chosen one." Directly he passed the barrier an enormous cheer was raised. Women struggled to kiss the hem of his garment. Men knelt, cap in hand, while Rasputin—like the Pope—blessed them with a movement of his hand.

Father John of Cronstadt and the monk Illiodor drew near, and after the Russian custom kissed him on the lips.

" Innovator, may you revive our beloved Russia ! " proclaimed John of Cronstadt.

" I will do what the Lord commands ! " answered the cynical Rasputin, humbly and theatrically.

Fresh fields were now open to the ex-carrier of Pokrovskoie wherein to satisfy his insatiable ambition.

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CHAPTER VI

Rasputin and Anna Vyronbova

ALL the aristocracy of Petrograd were to be met in the magnificent apartment in the Prospect Nevsky that Madame Bachmakow had rented and furnished for the holy father.

Visionary, sorcerer, conjurer, palmist, priest—without ever having been ordained—Rasputin more than satisfied his numerous clients.

Evidence of this is given in a report by the Okrana of April 12th, 1905:

"Crowds assemble at Rasputin's, and people wait two or three days before being able to approach the 'monk' (*sic*). Everybody acknowledges his remarkable prophetic faculties and his thaumaturgical gifts.

"He works miracles whenever it pleases him to do so. He has been seen to take a handful of earth, and by simply blowing upon it turn it into a magnificent rose tree covered with flowers. One day, on the Nevsky, he met a poor woman being wheeled about in a small carriage, and who for the last five years had lost the use of her legs. He came towards

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her, and after having looked at her steadfastly said in an imperious voice : ' Rise, my good woman, and walk ! ' And the woman rose and walked. . . .

" His followers are chiefly among the female sex. The writer of this report counted more than four hundred women before Gregory Rasputin's house on one single afternoon. As a rule he only receives the young and the pretty ones, because he says that the others have less sins to be forgiven. He devotes half an hour to each of them. When they leave him, they declare themselves purified, and unanimously sing the monk's praises.

" Gregory Rasputin must make a considerable sum of money. He has no fixed price for his consultations, but his secretary, a certain Striapcheff, who, before devoting himself to this new cult, was under police surveillance in Tobolsk, never introduces anybody without having first received at least a hundred roubles. The faithful who give more have special attention, and the holy man enters into many more details in his prophecies for them. Madame Narishkine offered a thousand roubles to be admitted immediately, and even then Striapcheff raised certain difficulties.

" All these amounts are put on one side for the church that the prophet has decided to build at Pokrovskoie, in honour of Saint Michael. It is believed that this work will soon be commenced owing to the number and the generosity of the faithful.

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"Gregory Rasputin has very powerful connexions. He visits the best families, and is received like a Grand Duke. His place is laid at Countess Ignatieff's table every evening . . ."

Countess Ignatieff's receptions were undoubtedly the most select in Petersburg. Politics and religion were the chief subjects of conversation. The highest dignitaries of the Church and the great military chiefs were to be met there. The Archbishop Theophane, the monk Illiodor, Bishop Hermogene, Father John of Cronstadt were constant visitors. It was through them that the doors of this fashionable salon were opened to Rasputin. Countess Ignatieff, a very good but terribly superstitious woman, received the Siberian chief with reverence. Everybody was soon in ecstasies over his grotesque platitudes, his rough manners and his primitive language; his trivial conversation was considered a mark of Divine inspiration.

"He's a living gospel," exclaimed the aristocratic ladies of Petrograd, as they listened to him.

Anna Vyronbova knew very little of what occurred in the city, owing to the seclusion in which she lived with the Czarina. These ladies spent the day and a portion of the night consulting Egyptian cards and coffee grounds. But at last Rasputin's fame reached them. The gentleman in waiting, Stakevitch, who had spent an evening with him at Countess Ignatieff's, gave such a glowing description of

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the monk that the Empress could no longer restrain her curiosity.

"Dearest Anna, go and see this new saint, and if you consider him as marvellous as he is said to be, bring him to the palace!"

Anna Vyronbova therefore went to Rasputin. The wily peasant was expecting her. From the day he arrived in Petrograd and had heard the small court scandals from Archbishop Theophane, he had been anxious to meet the Czarina. He never doubted a single moment that Alexandra Feodorovna, like the rest of her sex, would look upon him as a saviour, and he was already weighing the advantages that he would derive from this high connexion.

Gregory did not have much trouble in satisfying the Empress's confidante. This coarse, vulgar person was easily influenced. Rasputin, a shrewd psychologist, did not hesitate to explain his methods to her, without omitting the smallest detail. The final doctrine, "Sin for salvation," with which the pseudo-monk always ended his consultations whenever he was in contact with hysterical devotees, put the finishing touch.

A pact was soon made between these two. It was settled at once. Gregory threw over Madame Bachmakow and adopted Anna Vyronbova as "sister" in chief. And Anna in return promised to open the gates of the imperial palace for him and obtain him the Empress's favour.

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" But you must remember," said Alexandra's companion, " that the Czarina is very puritan in her ideas. Your nickname of Rasputin will not please her. Henceforth you must call yourself ' Novy ' (Innovator) which is better suited to the originality of your doctrine."

The same evening Gricha was presented at Court and introduced to the Emperor and Empress.

" Work a miracle for us ! " said the Czar, whose childish mind was always interested in conjuring.

Meekly Rasputin obeyed the autocrat.

" Here is a box of matches," he said. " I assure her gracious Majesty Alexandra Feodorovna that she cannot lift it. It weighs over a ton. . . ."

Nicolas laughed loudly and incredulously.

The monk continued :

" What am I saying, one ton ! Two, three tons and more ! Try ! "

The Czarina extended her hand towards the matchbox that she wished to move. Impossible !

" Try again," said Gregory.

Alexandra, astounded, cast a frightened glance at the smiling chief. As for the Czar, this classical experiment of suggestion, known to all frequenters of circuses and fairs, appeared to him to be supernatural.

"He is really a chosen of the Lord ! " declared Anna Vyronbova emphatically.

The next day Madame Bachkamow received an

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order from the imperial police to quit the capital without delay. And Rasputin, henceforth the official prophet, could at length work for the greater glory of Russia and the Romanoffs.

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CHAPTER VII

The Holy Synod Intervenes

ANYONE but Rasputin would have been satisfied to live quietly on the results of his profitable profession. The reigning spirit at court, as well as in the city, director of the Czarina's conscience, the delight of the Czar, the chosen companion of the Grand Duchesses Olga, Tatiana, Anastasia, of the Czarevitch Alexis, and Anna Vyronbova's lover, what more could he desire!

There have been charlatans who have understood their business in all countries and at all times. A prophet's trade has the incomparable advantage over all others of not demanding immediate results; it is sufficient that the prophecies take a nebulous hazy form that allow the masses to interpret them according to their fancy.

But the ex-carrier of Pokrovskoie was more ambitious than this. He had no intention of playing the part of an inspired buffoon or a mystical conjurer at Tsarskoie-Selo after the manner of Philip, the hairdresser, who had been imperial favourite at the beginning of Nicolas's reign. He

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had loftier aims; he sought, in fact, to be really the Lord's ambassador, the supreme master of the immense empire.

Gregory therefore took care to cultivate his reputation for sanctity in ecclesiastical circles. With this object in view he undertook long pastoral tours in company of the Archbishop Theophane, Bishop Hermogene, and the monk Illiodor, returning with renewed prestige. He was seen at Moscow, Odessa, Tiflis, Kiew, even at Nijni-Novgorod, with his magnetic eyes and his apostle's beard, delivering the Divine word, ordering special mortifications and new penances to the faithful, gradually seeking to become the real pope of the great Slav Church, by the side, or in fact above the Czar himself.

Nevertheless Gricha had not been able to bring about such a radical change in himself as to forget his drunken orgies of former days.

"Give up 'prayer with sacrifice,'" prudently advised Striapcheff, "because that will be your ruin. There are too many women in your life. Keep two, five, ten, if you like, but do not make women the basis of your doctrine!"

But Gregory, notwithstanding his sound common sense, could not free himself from either his hysterical impulses or his taste for raw spirits. The only concession he made to his faithful Striapcheff was to forswear vodka, the common spirit, and only get intoxicated on champagne or good brands of liqueurs. As for women, he continued to celebrate

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the sadic mass invented by him, both in public and in private, in the bathing establishments or elsewhere, as before.

"The day I cease to be Rasputin, and when pretty girls will no longer find in me the ardent exorciser who cleanses them of their sins, no one will take me seriously!" he would say with a shrug of his shoulders.

And perhaps he was not quite wrong!

In 1908, Gricha spent the summer months in his Siberian village. This was an historical event for Pokrovskoie. Accompanied by twelve "sisters," all ladies of high degree in Petrograd, attracted by his goat's beard and his large eyes, the prophet settled down in one of the finest houses of the locality, hired and luxuriously furnished by his major-domo Barnaby. With somewhat unexpected feeling he had his wife with her two daughters and her son to live in the same house with him, and generously placed a drawing-room and dining-room and three bedrooms at their disposal. He, Rasputin, occupied the first floor with his twelve "sisters," who each had a charmingly furnished room.

Gregory and his followers spent the mornings in the fields praying to the Supreme Being, humbly describing himself as the "earthly atom." The afternoons he spent alone. The evenings were devoted to music in the big gilded drawing-room where he had had a magnificent grand piano placed,

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that had cost five thousand roubles—as he took care to tell everybody. The majority of the "sisters" were musical; and there was singing and dancing until the early hours of the morning, to the indignation of the inhabitants.

At the end of the summer, the chief was recalled to Petrograd by the Czarina. Alexandra Feodorovna was bored when he was away, and Anna Vyronbova was jealous.

The "Novy" found his admirers and clients awaiting him in the capital. Nicolas the second was exceptionally amiable to him.

"Tell me, dearest," he said to him as soon as he arrived, "what favour have you to ask of me? I swear it shall be granted immediately!"

Rasputin was silent for a moment, and then answered gravely:

"I should like my friend Barnaby to be made Bishop of Tobolsk!"

Two days later an official telegram from the Holy Synod appointed Barnaby, the gardener, to the episcopacy of the Siberian town.

Suddenly, however, a thunder-cloud broke over the head of this odious charlatan. Those who had helped him at the commencement of his career—the Archbishop Theophane, the monk Illiodor, and Father John of Cronstadt—now understanding their mistake, and the terrible responsibility they were incurring by favouring the impostor, united to unmask him. One morning Gregory received an

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order from the Archbishop to appear before an ecclesiastical tribunal composed of a bishop, two canons, and three high officials of the civil courts.

The indictment was formidable. It contained a crushing statement from Illiodor:

"I went to Tzaryhine in the company of the Archbishop Hermogene and Gricha. I had never had much conversation with the latter, and in order to know more about him, I took him with me on a tour among my followers. His conduct revolted me. He seemed to be devoid of shame, only seeking the company of young and pretty women.

"I had the greatest difficulty in dragging him from the convent of Tzaryhine, where I had been foolish enough to introduce him to the Mother Superior. He wanted to go into all the cells to pray with the nuns, and as I prevented him from doing so he abominably insulted me.

"On our way an old woman knelt before him to receive his blessing, but he pushed her away so violently that her head struck the ground, and he said, laughing immoderately: 'I have no use for old goats!'

"I was already sufficiently edified, but I agreed to accompany him to Tobolsk, because I wanted to be quite certain of Gricha's mentality.

"I soon discovered him to be an impostor. He had no intellectual powers, no supernatural power, no feeling of honour. We happened to speak of the Czar and the Czarina. He expressed himself in

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connexion with their Majesties in terms that made me blush. I believe he must have been drunk, as I cannot otherwise explain his licentious remarks."

Monsignor Antoine, the former Archbishop of Tobolsk, whom Barnaby had succeeded, had sent a letter denouncing the ex-carrier as a dangerous rogue.

In fact, there were also complaints from the victims of Rasputin containing the most terrible accusations. Among them a letter from a mother of a family, living in Petrograd, stating that he had turned her two daughters' heads with his mummeries.

There were other proofs of the "Innovator's" ignominy, and the Archbishop Theophane had every reason to believe that Rasputin's career was going to be put an end to by a unanimous verdict. But he had reckoned without the Czarina. Anna Vyronbova had called upon the judges to inform them that the express wish of Alexandra Feodorovna was that the holy man should not be found guilty.

And Gregory was unanimously acquitted, the tribunal accepting his statement that the charges against him were unfounded.

It had been an anxious moment. Gricha should have understood that even in Russia scandal has its limits, and that one cannot always defy public opinion. But he was not clever enough to see the real philosophy of this affair, nor stupid enough to be afraid.

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Besides, he was encouraged by the protection he received from Alexandra and Nicolas, and saw no necessity for changing his methods.

Incomprehensible as it may appear, the more Rasputin was blamed the more the Czarina believed in him. The day after his acquittal, she received him at Tsarskoie-Selo in the most solemn manner, going to meet him as he entered her presence, kissing his hands and asking his forgiveness for the trouble his enemies had caused him.

She even went further, deciding that from this day the venerable chief should have the spiritual care of the Princesses Olga, Tatiana, Anastasia, and of the Czarevitch Alexis. This gave rise to an incident as comical as it was sad.

The Grand Duchesses' governess was justly indignant that Rasputin should be received at Court. She, however, consoled herself with the thought that the Czarina's and Anna Vyronbova's conduct were no concern of hers, and that as long as she was allowed to superintend the young princesses' education, she need not trouble about anything else.

But when she heard that Rasputin was to be the spiritual adviser of her pupils, she firmly believed that the Czar and the Czarina had gone out of their minds. She hurriedly packed her trunks and went straight to the British Embassy and said to Sir George Buchanan :

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" Tsarskoie-Selo has become a lunatic asylum. I cannot remain there another moment; please send me home without delay!"

At the end of 1909 there was another scandal. An old lady in Petersburg, Baroness F——, denounced Rasputin to the Holy Synod for having obtained 270,000 roubles from her under false pretences. From an inquiry made by the ecclesiastical authorities we learn the particulars of this new comedy. Gricha had introduced himself to Baroness F—— as the real incarnation of her husband, who had been dead about thirty years. In the course of a spiritualistic séance Jesus had appeared to the widow, and ordered her to hand over every penny of available money she possessed to the Chosen of the Lord. It was also proved that the rôle of Jesus was played by Striapcheff, and even the florist was discovered who had supplied the crown of thorns.

Soon after this, there were other complaints. One is worth relating, as it shows the influence the ex-carrier had on his credulous proselytes:

" For more than a year I am in the ' Innovator's ' power, and my life is a constant nightmare. I have often asked myself if the prophet is a saint or the most miserable of sinners. To-day I have come to the absolute conclusion that this man is a criminal and a lunatic."

The person who complained so bitterly continued:

" I want to avoid him, but through some mysteri-

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ous and invincible force I am unable to move. As soon as he appears his large piercing eyes penetrate the very depth of my being, and I fall on my knees vanquished and powerless.

"I beg to be delivered from this degrading suggestion. If Gregory is a demon, let him be driven away by holy water and the neccessary prayers in these terrible cases. I beg the Holy Synod to take pity on me!"

This time the Holy Synod felt compelled to act. An ecclesiastical tribunal was soon put in possession of such convincing proofs that all the Imperial influence could not save Rasputin; and he was condemned to spend a year in a monastery. But the Czarina induced the Czar to commute the sentence to exile in Pokrovskoie.

Gricha, therefore, returned in triumph to his native village, and not like an impostor who had been sentenced. In defiance of the tribunal, he brought back with him, to Siberia, his usual followers of hysterical society women; and the palatial residence, furnished some years previously by Barnaby, was once more the scene of festivities and the solemn masses that closed the ceremonies.

The only discordant note in all the praise and flattery that surrounded Rasputin was heard from his wife, Olga.

"Renounce your mission, Gricha," she repeatedly said. "Become once more the farmer and carrier of former days. You have saved a little money, and

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we can manage to live quietly by our work . . . ."

But Rasputin would not listen to her. Destiny had marked him for a more tragic ending.

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CHAPTER VIII

Rasputin Tricks the Czarina

WHEN Rasputin was exiled to Pokrovskoie, he was soon forgotten in certain circles in Petrograd. A gipsy sorceress, the Gradizka, had made an opportune appearance the very day after the prophet had left, and the aristocracy had been able to satisfy that craving for mysticism inherent in every Slav. Then came an American charlatan, followed by a Spanish palmist. . . .

But the Czarina and Anna Vyronbova had remained faithful to Rasputin. Every week the Imperial Siberian courier brought letters to Pokrovskoie, where Alexandra Feodorovna humbly implored the holy man's advice, and Anna informed him of the smallest events at Court.

Rasputin was personally unable to answer this precious correspondence. He was illiterate, and had to engage a secretary, the sister of Barnaby, the ex-gardener, whom he had made a Bishop. Nothing was undertaken in the Empire that had not been previously laid before the Chosen of the Lord. The

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little Siberian village had become the anti-chamber of power.

From 1909 to 1914 Gregory was frequently in Petrograd, whence he was immediately driven in a closed motor-car to Tsarskoie-Selo. In order that his visits should pass unnoticed, he disguised himself as a Cossack officer, and hid his piercing eyes beneath thick black glasses.

What was he doing at the Imperial palace ?

This is a particularly delicate question with which we will have to deal in a later chapter. Was there more between this wretched being and the Czarina than the relations of a spiritual director and a penitent sinner ? Is it not simpler and nobler to suppose that Alexandra Feodorovna could not exist without that mystical intercourse, when, in her religious fervour, she believed herself to be in direct communication with Providence ?

The reader will judge for himself by the documents that will be submitted to him.

Another reason, on the other hand, may perhaps explain the inexplicable.

Young Alexis, the heir presumptive, *ataman* of all the Cossacks, was of a very delicate constitution, and, often ailing, constantly caused great anxiety to those around him. We will not repeat the melodramatic legends that have been current about him. The story of that mysterious attempt of which he was a victim, while he was staying at Yalka, has never been confirmed. Was there not even a

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question of some abominable crime committed by a sailor who sought to exterminate the dynasty of the Romanoffs ?

At all events, Alexis' health was always precarious. Alexandra Feodorovna adored her son, and it is very probable that Rasputin, aided by Anna Vyronbova, succeeded in making her believe that he alone could save the Czarevitch owing to the divine spark—that is to say, the miraculous power—he possessed.

Something that occurred at Tsarskoie-Selo in the month of March, 1913, throws a singular light on this question.

The Czarevitch was in the habit of playing of an afternoon in one of the big drawing-rooms adjoining his mother's private apartments, where an English billiard table was a constant source of amusement to him.

One day, Gregory Rasputin, who had arrived the night before, was in the Czarina's boudoir conversing with the Empress and Anna Vyronbova. The conversation turned on warnings from above, and the pseudo-monk told the ladies how on various occasions Providence had informed him of the dangers that threatened those dear to him.

Suddenly Gricha jumped up, his eyes extended.

" Where is Alexis Nicolaievitch ? " he asked in a voice that trembled with emotion.

Alexandra, still under the influence of all she had heard, murmured :

" He is in the blue room, I presume. . . ."

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"Come quickly!" cried the chief, "to be in time to save him."

He started off, followed by the Empress and her lady-in-waiting. The young prince was quietly making cannons on the green table. Rasputin threw himself upon him and pulled him backwards. At this precise moment the huge chandelier just above the billiard table fell with a crash, burying the table beneath it. There is no doubt that without Gregory's intervention Alexis Nicolaievitch would have been killed.

It can be imagined the impression that this remarkable incident made on Alexandra. The Czar himself was so much affected by it that he gave "his son's saviour" a magnificent diamond worth thirty thousand roubles that had been presented to him at his coronation.

Nevertheless a careful inquiry might have explained the circumstance. Since the revolution the servants of Tsarskoie-Selo have made certain revelations, and one of them has given an interesting version of what occurred on that eventful day in the "blue room." By Anna Vyronbova's orders the young prince's play-room had been fitted up with machinery as for a pantomime. The iron rod that held the chandelier was attached to a beam in the ceiling. To saw through this beam and, by means of an accomplice on the roof, to drop the weight at a given moment was child's play for the wily peasant of Pokrovskoie and Anna Vyronbova.

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But the officials at Tsarskoie-Selo did not go closely into the matter. The report on this occasion concluded as follows:

"Wear and tear had caused a crack in the beams that held the chandelier, and the latter suddenly gave way. The necessary repairs were made in the course of the day."

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CHAPTER IX

An Attempt on his Life

IN 1905, during his first grand tour with Madame Bachmakow, Gregory Rasputin had something of a love story—if we can so describe the adventures of this bearded chief—with a peasant girl of Kiew, Kheone Gousseva.

Kheone Gousseva bore no resemblance to the massive creatures whom Rasputin had always favoured. She was singularly thin, and had magnificent eyes; her parents, small farmers, had given her a good elementary education at Kiew, and in her intimate circle she was called the "little princess" owing to her naturally elegant bearing and an intellectual finesse exceedingly rare in these rustic surroundings.

Rasputin had met her in the course of one of his walks across the fields, to which he was so partial, and during which he recruited so many adherents.

Young Kheone Gousseva immediately became enthusiastic about the holy man and his doctrines. What did the pseudo-monk really promise? Kheone certified later that he had sworn never to leave her,

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and "that when the hour of night should strike, to take her to the Lord!" They even say that their mystical intercourse had a less poetic ending.

Their romance was a short one. Rasputin never wasted more time than was necessary over his "converts." After a week the poor girl was deserted. The Chosen of the Lord had been recaptured by Madame Bachmakow and taken to Moscow.

Kheone Gousseva waited in vain for the prophet's return. And after two years' solitude, she learnt the truth and suffered in consequence. She was a strange creature where her faith was concerned, and yet more strange in her violent hatred. She went from one place to another speaking contemptuously of the pseudo-monk, and one day was seen at Tobolsk on her way to Pokrovskoie! But Rasputin was already powerful enough to have recourse to the police. The unfortunate girl was expelled and condemned to a month's imprisonment "for insults and blasphemies against the Lord" (*sic*).

As she came out of prison, she met, quite by chance, the monk Illiodor, who had now discovered his mistake in connexion with Rasputin and had denounced him to the Holy Synod. She confided in him and he consoled her as best he could.

"Write to me sometimes," said Illiodor, "and I will try to help you."

Kheone threw herself into this religious correspondence with her usual ardour, and gradually

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Illiodor's name became as sacred to her as Rasputin's had been. She found in her new mystical passion—this time exempt from anything profane —an incomparable source of consolation.

This correspondence between the imaginative peasant and the fanatical priest lasted three years, and suddenly ceased. Owing to Rasputin's hatred, and, in part, that Alexandra Feodorovna never forgave Illiodor the depositions he made before the Holy Synod, he had to leave Russia, and settle in Christiania.

When Kheone Gousseva heard of the fresh misfortune that had befallen her she was eager for reprisals ; she had not only herself to avenge but also her friend Illiodor !

She started immediately for Tobolsk on her way to Pokrovskoie. Her first attempt against Gregory had evidently been forgotten, for she was allowed to pass without difficulty. On the 28th of June, 1914, she came to the ex-carrier's. The latter, called to Tsarskoie-Selo a fortnight before, was not expected back until the end of the month. Kheone stood on the platform of the station at Tioumene and waited for him for forty-eight hours.

Rasputin arrived on the 30th at three o'clock in the afternoon. He wore a magnificent blue silk kaftan, a present from Anna Vyronbova. The peasant girl, pale as death, came towards him, her eyes ablaze :

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" Die ! miserable wretch, you who have been my ruin and the ruin of Saint Illiodor ! "

With these words she pointed her revolver at Rasputin and fired two shots, one of which entered the abdomen.

But the wound was not mortal; it might have been serious for any one but the pseudo-monk, whose exceptional strength was later on to give his illustrious assassins so much trouble. After three weeks at the Tioumene hospital Rasputin was himself again. It is true that he was treated imperially : a special telegram from the Czar to the Governor of Tobolsk, the day following the attempt, ordered that nothing was to be neglected to save the life of " one of the best friends of the Crown " !

As for Kheone Gousseva, she was arrested and never heard of any more. The semi-official papers announced that she had been medically examined, considered insane, and was placed in an asylum for idiots, but the precise spot was never known. There were *oubliettes*, and even tombs, in the prisons of autocratic Russia. . . .

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CHAPTER X

Amazing Letters from the Czarina to Rasputin

WHILST Rasputin was convalescent in Pokrovskoie war had broken out in Europe. All patriotic and liberal Russia, a large section of the conservatives, and the people as one man, gathered round the flag, against the Austro-Germans. The thoughts of the nation, directed towards the frontier, were for the moment no longer occupied with the troubles of the interior.

But notwithstanding the tragic importance of military events, the Czarina and Anna Vyronbova did not forget their holy man. They considered, in fact, that the moment had arrived to have him, who had been so unjustly treated, recalled in triumph to Petrograd. And Nicolas the Second, already staggering under the weight of his unexpected responsibility, could not or would not refuse the Czarina's request.

These are the words in which Alexandra Feodorovna announced that the gates of the capital and

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of Tsarskoie-Selo were once more open to the "Novy":

"I am infinitely happy, my beloved master, to be able to inform you that 'Niky' has realized the importance of your dear presence at Tsarskoie-Selo. Come back quickly, as my poor heart suffers to know you so far away, and I am lost if I cannot hold your hands in mine and find, in your eyes, the light of my soul.

"Do not let me wait an hour, as I have been terribly bored from the moment you left me. I hope, dearest Gricha, that this time our troubles are at an end; and that we shall never be separated again. As for me, I shall thank God if He allows me to die with you and gain—in your company—the heavenly paradise for which you have so delightfully prepared me.

"I am not the only one wishing for your return. Anna is also dying of impatience. Take pity on two women who adore you and can no longer live without you.

"Give me, in your thoughts, your most ardent blessing in anticipation of being able to give it me in person, my whole being in touch with yours. Your daughter who cherishes you. 'A.'"

This document, that is published for the first time, and which we have tried to translate as faithfully as possible, is more like a letter from a loving friend than a communication from an Empress.

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The letter that follows, which was published in Russia, is still more curious :

" I shall never be able to thank you sufficiently for all you have been and all you are to me, my dear Gricha. Is there a divine happiness greater than mine, when I rest my head on your shoulder, and, in silence, appreciate the joy of being near you, touching you, forgetful of all my troubles ? I owe this happiness to you, and you know I am grateful.

" You must forgive me if I am not always perfect. It is so difficult to be really a good Christian in the true sense of the word. I have some very bad habits that are difficult to get rid of. You will help me, will you not ? Remember that you must never leave me, that I adore you, and that I have confidence in you alone.

" Be kind to Anna. You know she has many troubles. Ask Providence to let me see you soon. In the meantime, I embrace you, imploring your dear blessing. Your daughter, ' A.' "

And this short note, the copy of which was given us by one of the Czar's former ministers :

" I have been awake all night. You were absent, and I was dead with grief. Come quickly, I want you more than the air I breathe. How can you be so hard to torture my poor heart ? You know I love nobody but you. . . . Your daughter, ' A.' "

When we read these documents, which are indisputably authentic, we come to singular conclusions.

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Must we believe, as it has frequently been insinuated in Russia, that Rasputin was something more than a spiritual director for Alexandra Feodorovna ?

It is a very delicate question. A very distinguished Frenchman, M. de Ch——, who is well acquainted with the Russian aristocracy, and who was frequently at Tsarskoie-Selo up to the eve of the revolution, remarked not long ago to us :

" I refuse to believe anything so abominable ! It is not possible that the Czarina, who, although a German, had received a puritan education, and who showed an invincible repugnance for all that was not absolutely clean, could have had any other relations with that horrible Rasputin but those pertaining to religion."

We, who are historians and not novelists, cannot take sides, but must content ourselves with placing facts before our readers to enable them to form an opinion. Besides, it will be seen in another chapter how Rasputin expressed himself publicly on this question.

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CHAPTER XI

More Strange Doings

RASPUTIN continued to lead a brilliant and profitable life, endowed with both a divine and an imperial mission. His influence at Court had never been greater. In the excitement of war, the rather childish mysticism of the Imperial couple had increased, and the false monk obtained whatever he required through it.

He was living now somewhat simply in the Gorokhovaia, not far from the Winter Palace, which allowed him to be at the Empress's orders any hour of the day or night.

In his leisure moments he became interested in business. His study—where the rich presents showered upon him by Alexandra and Nicolas and the gifts of the generous and grateful followers of the new cult were untidily tossed here and there—was soon full of visitors: army contractors, shady bankers, generals of little value, all eager for honours and wealth, ready to pay dearly for the ex-carrier's protection.

This was the brightest moment in Rasputin's

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career. Anna Vyronbova, his faithful and adoring collaborator, looked after his interests at Tsarskoie-Selo, keeping him informed of every visit paid to the Czar and of all the Court intrigues. He had a first-class tout in the person of Prince Andromikoff, belonging to one of the best families of Moscow, who, after an adventurous life, succeeded in becoming the editor of the *Golos Rouspie*, a rather important paper. Through him Gricha became acquainted with Manus, the well-known blackmailer and tricky trader, to whom he gave large orders for munitions and the title of Excellency, in exchange for the nice little sum of 360,000 roubles! It was Manus who introduced General Soukhomlinoff to Rasputin, the General who agreed to pay the pseudo-monk 5,000 roubles per month to uphold him to the end.

But Rasputin's most fantastic transaction was made with the help of Barnaby, the gardener, his former major-domo, now Bishop of Tobolsk.

One day Barnaby, who had kept his head on his shoulders, notwithstanding his ecclesiastical honours, had the genial idea to make a saint.

This was excellent business in Russia, the new saints being considered to have more influence than the old ones, more prestige in the eyes of Providence, all the faithful arriving in shoals directly one springs up. Money and jewels poured into the chapel raised in his honour.

Count Witte used to say, and he knew what he

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was talking about: "A good saint is worth more to a community than the income derived from a hundred houses in Petersburg!"

Barnaby's plan was very simple. In the archives of his episcopacy he had come upon the name of an honest Archbishop of Tobolsk, dead many years, whose life had been spent in prayer and charity. The former gardener, who somehow felt that Rasputin's "cult" would not last for ever, looked to the future in the building of a chapel in honour of the old defunct priest.

Gricha agreed to take up this matter, in which his friend Barnaby gave him a half share, and Alexandra Feodorovna obtained "Niky's" authority for the confederates to sanctify the Archbishop. But the Holy Synod, notwithstanding the prophet's servile attitude, refused to give their consent to this disgraceful comedy.

"Canonise him yourself!" telegraphed Rasputin to Barnaby.

And this Bishop, who could have figured in a comic opera in a most comical mandate, did what Gricha told him to do.

As a consequence, the intellectual circles of Russia were convulsed with laughter. But the ignorant and credulous masses became enthusiastic over this saint that the Holy Synod would not recognize. As Barnaby, in the course of a few days, had had a temporary chapel erected in the woods without any ornaments whatever but with an

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immense box to hold the offerings, the pilgrims, eager to satisfy themselves of the virtues of this new saint, began to muster from far and wide. In a day or two the Bishop of Tobolsk had collected over 200,000 roubles, and the railway was so congested that the Ministry of Public Works had to forbid the use of it.

The Synod decided to interfere. It convoked Barnaby to Petrograd.

"Must I go?" the Bishop telegraphed to Rasputin. And Gregory, admirably collected and sure of himself, answered:

"Come and fear nothing; I am here!"

I saw the report drawn up by the Holy Synod on this occasion. Barnaby was superbly cynical and contemptuous. He appeared before the grand ecclesiastical tribune with a smile on his lips, listened to all the observations made to him and with remarkable coolness declared that he no longer acknowledged the Holy Synod's authority!

They wanted to arrest him. Rasputin ordered Prince Andromikoff to hide him. Two members of the police were told off to keep him under observation; Gregory had them followed and obtained an order from the Emperor to have them exiled to Siberia.

Finally, the Bishop of Tobolsk returned to his episcopacy in triumph, and found his saint daily gaining in popularity.

As to Rasputin, he had his revenge on the Holy

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Synod by making the public prosecutor Samarin lose his berth; it was he who had nearly upset Gregory's plans by his honesty of purpose.

It was about this time we hear of the miraculous history of the pseudo-monk's two daughters. Mariska and Zenia were now about eighteen and seventeen years old. They were both dark, with magnificent black eyes like their father's, and they carried themselves with a certain natural grace rarely seen in peasants from Pokrovskoie, but they acquired a certain polish by coming in contact with the aristocratic ladies who approached their father for their spiritual cure. In this way they played tennis, sang to their own accompaniment and could talk about fashions.

One of Rasputin's protégés, a pope of the name of Boris, and a fervent believer in the Chief, went about the populous districts of Petrograd making certain prophecies that had a great success.

One day, Boris announced that the Virgin Mary had appeared to him and had said:

"It is necessary for the salvation of Russia that the daughters of the man who has been given the spark of divine omnipotence, and who is already established in the position he merits, at the right hand of our little father Nicolas and his spouse, should marry. Their husbands will become the beloved sons of Providence, and nothing will be refused unto them."

It is not difficult to gather from whom this celes-

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tial communication came. And Rasputin received countless offers of marriage for his daughters. This would have occurred, no doubt, before the intervention of the Virgin if the existence of these young ladies had been known. But hitherto Gregory had not spoken about his family.

A General, two members of the Duma, several financiers and a professor of the Moscow University were among the candidates for the honour of becoming Rasputin's sons-in-law.

But the ex-carrier was in no hurry. He no doubt considered that his daughters could aspire higher.

He lost no time in having them come to live with him. Anna Vyronbova undertook to introduce them into society, and when she took anything in hand Rasputin knew from his own experience that she was sure to succeed.

"They may perhaps marry a Grand Duke!" she said to him.

And the pseudo-monk already pictured himself the father-in-law of a Romanoff.

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CHAPTER XII

Rasputin Orders the Czarina to End the War

APRIL 20th, 1915, an official *communiqué* announced the retreat of the Russian army in Poland and caused general consternation in Petrograd. Everybody was terribly distressed, and groups formed in the streets to demand a better military organization and the punishment of the traitors.

That night, about eleven o'clock—as is reported by the Okrana, showing the activity of the service —a woman called on Rasputin, at the Gorokhovia. Her face was hidden beneath a thick white veil, which made the *dvornik* (porter) take her for a lady in search of adventure.

The pseudo-monk was absent.

" I will wait for him," she said and stood at the entrance in the vestibule.

In Russia, visits can be paid at any hour of the night without exciting comment. It is not at all a rare occurrence to receive an invitation at midnight for supper, and it oftens happens that a friend

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passing your door about two o'clock in the morning comes up to tell you his latest extravagance.

The porter was in no way surprised at the insistence of this mysterious lady. As a matter of fact, he had seen so many of these singular penitents who came at all times to invoke his master's divine omnipotence and who even sometimes waited for days before they were admitted into his presence.

The " staretz " came in at one o'clock. He was in his normal condition—that is to say nearly sober.

" You are not lucky, my pretty one," he said, as he noticed his visitor, whom he no doubt took for a new client. " I am not up to the mark to-night and I am very sleepy ! "

But the lady shrugged her shoulders.

" Gregory Effimovitch, I have not come to consult you on a religious question," she murmured, " but on a mission that may be a profitable one."

Rasputin was interested at once.

" Come to my study, madam," he said gravely, with every mark of respect.

There were no witnesses to the interview. Nevertheless through the Okrana we can easily reconstitute it.

The woman's name was Cecilia Werner. She had been governess for about a few months at the beginning of the war, in a Polish family. She called herself Galician, and in her conversation gave proof of being a patriot and strongly pro-German. After leaving her employers she had opened a hat shop

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in the Prospect Nevsky. Every three months she went to Stockholm to buy goods, and returned with a few hats and ribbons that bore the unmistakable stamp of Berlin. It was considered clever on her part to have been able to obtain the necessary passports, at the time when travellers to Sweden had the greatest difficulty to get there. But it was understood that she was generous in her bribes, which accounted for everything.

Her visit to Rasputin lasted some time. It was nearly dawn when she left the Gorokhovaia.

What did these two people have to say to each other ?

In a report of the Okrana, dated August 9th, 1916, we find a curious notice concerning Cecilia Werner :

" Is supposed to be a spy in the service of Germany. But there has never been any real proof of the fact.

" A singular correspondence was discovered in the course of a visit to her home made during her absence. In a secret drawer a series of photographed letters were found, all signed : A, written without the slightest doubt by a very great lady at Court. These letters of a highly sentimental nature were addressed to General O——, now deceased, and must have been written about ten years ago.

" All these letters were intact. It appeared, in fact, that neither by their contents, nor their desti-

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nation, nor their date, could they constitute an act of spying."

If the police of Petrograd were satisfied with this conclusion, it no doubt suited them to be so. To all who remember General O——'s adventures that were related in a preceding chapter, the intervention of Father John of Cronstadt, the exile and sudden death of this handsome officer at Cairo, the report of the Okrana is a revelation. At least, that is how we understand it.

Here then—if the reader will allow us to be hypothetical—is what must have occurred between Rasputin and his visitor.

Cecilia Werner, an Austrian, born in Vienna, January 23rd, 1890, and not in Galicia, was undoubtedly a spy in Petrograd, and went to Stockholm every three months with the sole object of making her report and obtaining her instructions.

It will be remembered that after General Prince O——'s mysterious death in Egypt, a trunk full of documents had disappeared.

There is every reason to believe that Germany, aware of the idyll between the General and the great lady already referred to in Chapter III, were anxious to get hold of these documents, wishing to be armed against her who had been weak enough to write to the fascinating officer and whose influence in Russia could become of the highest importance.

During one of her journeys to Sweden, Cecilia Warner must have received the photographs of

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these dangerous love letters, which in her hands were a formidable means of causing pressure where pressure was required. But the spy—for it was certain she was one—was too clever to undertake an open and uncommonly dangerous attack. She therefore thought of Rasputin, and managed, by means of a considerable bribe, to make him act in the manner assigned to him.

At what price the pseudo-monk sold himself to the Austrian woman has never been known, as he never gave a receipt and hardly ever accepted a cheque.

All we know is that from this moment Gregory became strongly averse from war and violently in favour of immediate peace. Anna Vyronbova has taken care to explain this sudden conversion of a man who, the very day before, upheld the necessity of fighting " those dirty Germans."

In her diary, which she wrote day by day, and which is for the greater part in the hands of the Provisional Government, Anna wrote on September 3, 1915 :

" Gricha has surpassed himself to-night. He evoked for Alexandra Feodorovna and me the ghost of poor General O——, who was so cowardly murdered. In the darkness, that our holy man required for his spiritual communications, we suddenly saw a whitish column of smoke which gradually took human shape.

" It was General O——. We did not recognize

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him at once, as his outline was rather vague, and we could not distinguish his voice as he spoke so softly. But Gricha heard everything he said. The General, who to judge by this conversation was woefully sad, told us how he had been killed by two masked men in his room in the hotel at Cairo, and we shivered, both of us, at the horrible account he gave of his sufferings.

"Then, to show how faithful was his love, notwithstanding his death and the years that had passed, he recited whole pages from the letters addressed to him in bygone days by her whom he adored. And Alexandra nearly fainted as she listened to this.

"Finally, the General expressed his horror of the present war, that he called a disgrace to humanity. He described the sorrow of the mothers and orphans in harrowing terms, and he asked the Empress to do all in her power to put an end to this unholy butchery. Alexandra asked him what the Lord thought of the attitude of Russia, and the spectre replied—always through Novy—that the Supreme Being protected Prince Alexis Nicolaievitch and would grant him everlasting protection if Russia hastened to make peace. And the Czarina promised to use her influence in this direction with the Czar."

This, better than a long speech for the defence, will somewhat exonerate the unfortunate Empress. A bad patriot, and faithful to the duties of her position, she was perhaps not entirely so, owing to

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her hatred of Russia and servility to Germany. Her futile mysticism and blind confidence in Rasputin no doubt gave her the sad courage to betray the throne and the people and to seek by every possible means to end the war.

Between the cynicism of the Chief and the hypocritical devotion of the odious Anna, frightened as a wife and mother by the perpetual threats that the "Innovator" pretended came from Heaven, the Empress had neither the strength of will nor the energy to resist. And this may perhaps explain certain mysterious facts.

Having triumphed over Alexandra, and through her, no doubt, over the weak and cowardly Czar, Rasputin was master of the situation. One morning, he went to the G.Q.G. and had himself introduced immediately to the General in Chief, the Grand Duke Nicolas Nicolaievitch.

The Emperor's uncle had always shown the greatest antipathy to this common charlatan. But he nevertheless received him in order to avoid any possible trouble to himself.

"I have come to inform you of a communication that the Virgin made to me last night. She ordered me to come and tell you that she wished the war to end as soon as possible. And that if you did not do your utmost to bring about this result she would curse you and your descendants."

The Grand Duke Nicolas listened to him patiently. And when he had finished he cried:

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" And to me, moujik, the Virgin appeared telling me that an abominable wizard and a silly impostor would call on me to-day and that I should be well advised if I had him flogged and driven off like a dog ! "

Rasputin did not require to be told twice, and went away.

But shortly afterwards the Grand Duke Nicolas received the news of his downfall and left for the Caucasus.

The pseudo-monk had had his revenge.

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CHAPTER XIII

The Czar Suspects

FROM this moment, the ex-carrier Gregory, called the "Innovator," directed the affairs of State and the entire Imperial policy, from the Czarina's boudoir, with neither responsibility nor remorse.

He was exceedingly familiar with the high ecclesiastics and almost rough to the men holding important positions. No preferment was given without his consent.

In his study, in the Gorokhovaia, honours and sinecures were distributed with a free hand. Decorations and provincial governments were sold to the highest bidder.

Rasputin was too clever to be seen in these matters, but his secretary, the sister of the Bishop Barnaby, and his broker Prince Andromikoff, looked after his interests and made his clients pay both dearly and in advance.

A word from Gricha overcame every difficulty. He corresponded with all the authorities in a free

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and easy manner, and none thought of disobeying his orders or neglecting his advices.

Goremykine, the President of the Imperial Council, and Prime Minister, an honest man but a servile courtier, bowed low as Rasputin passed. He gave a start when he received the first note from the Chief, where in an amiable and friendly way Rasputin called him "Staritch Oka"—which in Russian is equivalent to "Old boy"—but he soon got used to it.

In the meanwhile the war was carried on in the most terrible confusion and to the utter indifference of the Court.

The news of the military disasters were received in a manner that was strangely resigned and philosophical. The Empress, who during the first year of war had conscientiously done her duty as a Russian sovereign, now only saw in the defeat of the Moscovite armies the opportunity for inducing "Niky" to conclude a separate peace with Germany.

She, who had never interested herself in politics, now feverishly examined every telegram and report. Rasputin and Vyronbova helped her in her task, which was never allowed to be disturbed except by the question of her dear son's health.

One morning, as the Czar was reading the *Novoie Vremia* at Tsarskoie-Selo—it has since been said that a special copy of this paper was printed for the Emperor each day—Count Tolstoi, Second Grand Master of Ceremonies, in charge of the Her-

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mitage, begged an audience on a very important matter.

As soon as he entered the Czar noticed he was extremely pale and terribly excited.

" What is the trouble to-day ? " asked Nicolas, who considered this functionary to be his most pessimistic collaborator.

" I have some very serious news to communicate to your Majesty," said Count Tolstoi, in a voice that was scarcely audible. " Strange things are happening at the Hermitage. We were all very proud of the magnificent Crown Jewels, which were considered the most beautiful and rare in the world. I have watched over them with all the solicitude and devotion of which I am capable. Every day a special functionary—whose honesty is above suspicion—made sure that these precious jewels were safely locked in their case, of which beyond him and me only your Majesty and her gracious Majesty the Empress know the secret."

Count Tolstoi stopped, overcome by emotion.

" And then ? " inquired the Emperor impatiently.

" Do not blame me, sir, for what I have to tell you to-day, but of all those admirable pearls and incomparable stones there remained two or three dots, nothing but the recollection of them."

Nicolas started up and coming close to Count Tolstoi seized him by the throat :

" What ! you have allowed the Crown Jewels to be stolen."

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" How could I imagine, sir, they ran any danger at the Hermitage in a case, I repeat, of which the secret was only known to four persons absolutely above suspicion ? "

" But how can you make me believe that it was possible to abstract the stones unknown to either you or your assistants ? "

" For the simple reason, sir, that clever workmen were employed, who inserted, in place of the diamonds, sapphires, enamels and pearls, pebbles of the same colour that were only discovered after a minute examination."

The Czar, in a paroxysm of rage, interrupted Count Tolstoi :

" But this could not have been done in one night ; it must have taken days, even weeks ; the miscreants must have been able to enter and leave the Hermitage at all hours of the day and night."

" I did not dare say so, sir."

Notwithstanding the Count's positive assertion, Nicolas still hesitated to believe what he had heard. He therefore had two experts called in, whom he himself questioned that same afternoon at the Winter Palace.

It was not possible to have any further doubt. Horrible coloured paste had taken the place of the pure marvels in the Crown treasure. The magnificent garnets in the Great Katherine's diadem, the pearls in Ivan's crown, the blue diamonds

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that bordered the State saddle belonging to Alexander the Second, all these had been cleverly abstracted and replaced by imitations, recognized at a glance by a connoisseur.

An incident showed that the thefts committed had been even greater than at first imagined. One of the experts, passing through the Grand Gallery in the Winter Palace, exclaimed, pointing at one of the Gobelins: "This tapestry is a vile fraud!"

It had to be acknowledged that the same ingeniousness that had been shown in replacing the Imperial jewels was seen in substituting valueless copies of the priceless *chefs d'œuvres* in the Czar's palace.

Nicolas was aghast, but the expert's opinion was conclusive. They even certified that the work could only have been carried out by specialists, solely to be found in Germany.

As the Czar was preparing to return to Tsarskoie-Selo, he cast a last inquiring glance at Count Tolstoi.

"Sir," the Grand Master of Ceremonies answered to this mute question, "allow me to assure you on my honour that neither my assistant nor I have had anything to do with the lost stones."

"Then," murmured the Emperor, "as there were only two other people in the secret, Alexandra Feodorovna and myself. . . ."

Count Tolstoi was silent.

Back in Tsarskoie-Selo, the Czar made straight for the Empress's apartments.

Countess Narychkine, first lady in waiting, was

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reading to the sovereign. The Czarina received the news quietly enough, to Nicolas's great indignation. But the Empress remarked:

"As long as our dear Alexis is spared to us, what does the rest matter?"

In a flash Nicolas then, no doubt, began to see things that he had never suspected, for he grew as pale as death.

"Too much is hidden from me, madam," he said in a low voice, "and this time I demand to know the truth!"

Alexandra Feodorovna was about to speak, when Anna burst into the room:

"Come quickly, come," she cried; "Alexis Nicolaievitch has a hæmorrhage!"

This interruption put an end to a scene that might have been a painful one. As we have already said, the Czarevitch's health was a constant source of anxiety to the Imperial couple.

This delicate child has inherited the hæmorrhages of the Hesse-Darmstadts from his mother. It was said at Court that it had been Bismarck's aim to exterminate the Romanoff dynasty by this marriage of a princess of Hesse-Darmstadt with the future Czar.

The hæmorrhage this time, however, proved to be a false alarm, but there was no more mention that day of the Hermitage affair.

The next day Count Tolstoi received the following lines in Nicolas' own handwriting:

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"Do not continue the inquiry about the Hermitage. Let it remain a profound secret."

Later, on the morrow of the Revolution, the new Russian authorities had to be brought to acknowledge that the Crown Jewels, the treasure of the nation, had been scandalously counterfeited. By whom and for whom had these priceless jewels been abstracted? If Rasputin had not been killed, he could probably have given some valuable information on this subject to-day. He could doubtless have explained why, at this time, Cecilia Werner suddenly left Petrograd for Stockholm and probably for Darmstadt, with a diplomatic passport, preventing her luggage from being inspected at the custom house.

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CHAPTER XIV

Rasputin "Master of Russia"

IN September, 1915, Mr. Khvostov, specially recommended by Rasputin, succeeded Prince Tcherbatoff as Minister of the Interior.

"I will be your faithful agent," the new Minister promised the Chief, "and your slightest wish will be a command."

The pseudo-monk was happy to have such a representative at the Ministry. Little by little he influenced all the services of the Russian administration, and the number of his creatures, his spies, and his accomplices increased with his victims.

Khvostov was ambitious, crafty and cunning, and sufficiently unscrupulous not to stop at half-measures; he looked forward to becoming Prime Minister, even Grand Chancellor.

"Bismarck," as he used to say, "had fewer trump cards than I, and he was nevertheless brilliantly successful."

For a while the "Innovator" and the Minister were on most friendly terms. But they quarrelled on quite an insignificant matter.

Rasputin had discovered a certain person at

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Kief, who was at the same time a writer and an insurance broker; in inspired moments this man composed an ode in honour of the "Innovator," whom he compared to Minine, the heroic butcher of Moscow and the saviour of Russia.

In the acknowledgment of this compliment Rasputin asked Khvostov to make his new protégé General Inspector of Police.

Although the Minister was, as a rule, always ready to do all Rasputin required, he refused to make such a ridiculous nomination.

The ex-carrier was, however, as merciless in his hatred as he was ardent in his friendships. This he soon made Khvostov understand and began to influence the Czar and Czarina against him.

The Minister of the Interior was well aware of what was in store for him. He knew that as long as Rasputin lived he could never realize his ambitions and, without any apparent effort, he soon came to the conclusion that Rasputin must die!

Just then, a recent police report laid before Khvostov revealed the formidable plan that the monk Illiodor—an exile in Norway after having been one of Rasputin's greatest supporters—was fostering revenge on his former friend. The Minister therefore took advantage of this.

Khvostov had a certain Rjevski in his employ, a discreditable detective ready to entertain anything, who had already shown his abilities in several dirty affairs.

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"Go to Christiania," said Khvostov, "and make Illiodor's acquaintance. Here are 5,000 roubles. Go quickly and do your best. You will be well received."

Illiodor lived in Christiania, in the utmost poverty, dreaming of revenge. Every day he received consoling letters from Tsaristine, from his followers, who wrote in enthusiastic terms of their wish to serve him and their desire to see him back again in Russia.

Rjevski had little trouble in interesting Illiodor in his plot. The latter agreed to find five of his partisans from Tsaristine who would shrink at nothing.

Besides, the affair, notwithstanding its dangers, was not uninteresting. All the papers required by the assassins in Petrograd would be prepared and handed to them through the Ministry of the Interior, and in addition, a nice little sum of 160,000 roubles was guaranteed them by Khvostov himself as a reward.

The plot had been carefully laid. Rasputin was to be stabbed, in the Gorokhovaia, as he returned home, and the bomb opportunely thrown at the same moment would be sufficient to occupy the police in order to give the murderers time to escape.

But chance made Rasputin aware of what was being planned against him.

Rjevski had founded a club for journalists in Petrograd, with the object of hiding his game, and probably also of obtaining the help of the press for

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his master, the Minister of the Interior. There he made the acquaintance of an architect named Heine, who soon became his friend. The intimacy between these two men was so great that the detective often telephoned the most important questions to Khvostov before the architect. One day Heine assisted at a stormy scene between Rjevski and his mistress, a little actress at the Marie Theatre, who had already caused the detective more or less trouble by her indiscretions.

This was an unexpected opportunity for Heine. When Rjevski left he entered into conversation with the woman, who under the influence of her wrath, told him the whole conspiracy, the arrival of Illiodor's partisans in Petrograd, their plans and their certainty of being immediately accomplished.

The architect Heine was intelligent and ambitious. He understood at a glance all the advantages to be derived from this information. If so many favours had been bestowed on Rasputin as the saviour of the Czarevitch, what was in store for him as the saviour of Rasputin, the saviour of the saviour!

It was not an easy matter to approach Rasputin. He was well guarded and the porter never admitted any one who did not bring money or a promise of money.

Heine was therefore refused admission.

As he returned, somewhat disconcerted at the failure of his undertaking, some one suddenly called out:

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"What do you want of the 'Novy'?"

Heine turned round. He saw a man about forty years old, pale and poorly dressed.

"I am Simanovitch, the police inspector, and my duty is to guard the venerable Gregory. If you have an important communication to make him, confide it to me and I will inform him."

"Heaven has sent you!" exclaimed Heine. And he told the inspector all the details of the affair, begging him to inform the Chief without delay.

Rasputin was all the more impressed by Simanovitch's report of this conversation, as that very morning he had had a telephonic call from the editor of the *Kolokol* telling him that there were rumours in Petrograd that he had been seriously wounded.

"Go to Madame Vyronbova at once," Rasputin said to Simanovitch, "and tell her I am in danger."

Anna immediately informed the Czarina, who ordered the police and civil authorities of Petrograd to take the necessary steps.

But Rjevski could not be arrested without he confessed. This was no easy matter, as the police did not dare lay hands on him without a motive.

Rasputin, however, overcame the difficulty. One morning, as Rjevsky was entering a carriage, a young lieutenant of the Empress's guard pushed him on one side and tried to take his place.

"I beg your pardon," said Rjevski in a rage, "but I called this carriage. . ."

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" That is a lie ! " answered the officer.

A struggle ensued, as the detective knew he was protected by Khvostov.

The lieutenant unsheathed the sword and made a thrust at him.

There was already a crowd around the two men and gendarmes soon came on the scene.

" Follow us, both of you," said one of them. " You can explain matters to the Commissary." Without the slightest suspicion of the plot, Rjevski consented, and his companion made no objection. The trick was done.

At the police station the detective learned to his consternation that he was charged not only with this affair but with another of a much more serious nature, and the Commissary quietly pronounced the name of Rasputin.

This was too much ! Rjevski, frightened at what was occurring, thought that the only thing to be done was to denounce Khvostov. And he immediately wrote to the " Innovator," giving him all the details of the conspiracy.

" I am saved ! " said Rasputin, when he read the note, " and Khvostov is lost for ever ! "

The police, stimulated by the Court, were most energetic over this business.

The famous order for 160,000 roubles to be given to the exile in Christiania was discovered at Rjevski's apartment, besides several revolvers and some compromising correspondence.

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Affairs followed their natural course. On March 6th, 1915, an Imperial decree accepted Khvostov's dismissal and made Sturmer, who was already Prime Minister and another of Rasputin's tools, Minister of the Interior. As for Rjevski, no time was lost in transporting him to Siberia.

Heine and Simanovitch looked forward to their reward: it came all too soon.

The architect, who was sent to the Caucasus to make a report on the mining situation, disappeared without anybody hearing what became of him. Simanovitch, suddenly implicated in the escape of an Austrian officer, was arrested, kept a few months in prison, and then sent to Tver, where he may be to this day.

In this manner Rasputin had got rid of two enemies, Khvostov and Illiodor, at one blow, and kept a creature like Sturmer in the highest position without any fear of a rival.

There was nothing now to oppose his plans. He was the uncontested master of Russia.

The Duma was, however, to be reckoned with. There was no question of interfering between Khvostov and Rasputin; they were both equally contemptible and capable of any crime to satisfy their ambition. But this scandal was a fresh proof of the decay of the autocratic régime, and the most honest and courageous amongst the members of the Duma began to protest.

People have often admired the intelligence and

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finesse of the pseudo-monk who had risen to such eminence. In truth, Rasputin never deserved such praise. If he had been really clever, he would have understood that he was losing ground and that it was advisable for him to retire while it was still time.

Rasputin was too sure of himself, certain that no harm could befall him.

Nevertheless the day of reckoning was near !

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CHAPTER XV

"Death is War"

"MADAM, it is impossible to go any farther; there is no more petrol."

"It can't be helped, Vissini; I will walk home. A ten minutes' walk is not so terrible. . . ."

This occurred in the Moskvia on November 7th, 1915, about ten o'clock at night.

It was very cold and very bright.

There were few people in the avenue, for Russians, who love an out-of-door life in summer, remain at home during the winter in front of the fire, before the enticing samovar.

The lady left her chauffeur to his troubles and leisurely turned into the Prospect Nevsky on her way to the Moika.

The rare passers-by looked after her admiringly. She wore a long chinchilla coat and a toque of the same fur, charmingly posed on her black hair, with a smartness that any page at Tsarskoie Selo might have envied. Her face, on the whole, perhaps lacked refinement, but as her full red lips parted,

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showing her brilliant teeth, and her beautiful eyes sparkled, one could not help saying :

" What a pretty woman ! "

In front of the Dono Restaurant there was a noisy party and she hurried past to avoid being recognized.

" Hallo ! why does the most beautiful of dancers try to avoid me ? "

She turned in surprise.

A man in a superb sable coat stood before her, looking at her with the most fascinating and penetrating eyes in the world.

" The Innovator," she said, smiling as she recognized Rasputin.

" Yes, the ' Innovator,' who is very happy to meet you and anxious to explain the beauties of his admirable cult to you this very night."

With these words the Chief tried to put his arm round her waist. But she quickly moved away.

" You have been drinking, Rasputin," she cried, in a contemptuous tone, " or you forget to whom you are speaking."

This disdainful remark made no impression on him.

" I know you are Karali, the most charming and delightful of ballet dancers in Moscow, and I offer you a glass of champagne at my house."

He drew nearer to seize his prey, but with a quick movement the young woman struck him a violent blow in the face. And while the " Innovator," under the effects of the Crimean wine he had been

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drinking, recovered from the suddenness of the attack, she drew her skirt and coat closer about her and ran as fast as she was able.

At this moment Rasputin's companions joined him.

" Ha, ha," laughed Prince Andromikoff, sarcastically. " There is anyhow one woman who has resisted you ! "

" I swear she shall pay for it ! " cried the venerable Gregory.

Andromikoff burst out laughing.

" Don't be foolish ! You forget that Vera Karali is the mistress of a man more powerful than you are, and that she will know how to take care of herself."

The pseudo-monk looked almost diabolical.

" I swear she shall do as I say or she shall lose her head, if I have to wreck the Empire and destroy the Winter Palace for it ! "

Rasputin's companions were silent. They knew the consequences of his terrific rages. Also that it was useless to reason with Rasputin. Only Andromikoff said, " Take care, Gricha, that she does not make the first move. . . ."

* * * * *

A week had elapsed since this scene occurred.

There were a number of people making merry at Coutant's, just as they did before the war. Although champagne cost fifty roubles a bottle, there was no lack of it.

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The Grand Duke Dimitri Pavlovitch, son of the Grand Duke Paul and first cousin of the Czar, was seated with Prince Youssoupoff at a table with Staritchin and two other guests.

At another table, a little farther off, were Rasputin, Prince Andromikoff, Striapcheff—the pseudo-monk's faithful secretary—General Vokoutitch and two or three minor stars.

Everybody was laughing and joking, and talking at the top of their voices. Rasputin, more noisy than usual, was speaking disparagingly of the whole of Russia.

"I don't care a button top for the Grand Dukes, nor the ministers, nor the president of the Holy Synod, nor all the Alexieffs and Broussiloffs on earth!" he cries.

Dimitri Pavlovitch changed colour. Unconsciously he tightened his grasp on the glass in his hand and it broke in a thousand pieces.

"If that fellow does not leave off, I'll kill him like a dog," he said to Prince Youssoupoff.

"Be careful, Dimitri Pavlovitch, he is more powerful than we are, and he could do us all a great deal of harm by appealing to you know who I mean."

But Rasputin continued:

"Their wives and their mistresses! I do not admit that they question my authority, and when I do a dirty dancer like Karali the honour——"

The Grand Duke rose. It was said that he was a great friend of the pretty dancer! He was about

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to throw himself on the sorcerer to strike him, perhaps to kill him. Luckily for Rasputin, some well-known people entered at this moment and caused a diversion.

Among them was Pourichkievitch, the Conservative member just returned from the Duma.

A few hours before he had made a violent speech at the Tauride Palace against the man whom he called the "director of Russian politics."

"It must no longer suffice that this impostor's visiting card can open the doors of the Ministries as well as gain imperial favours for the most dishonourable and disreputable persons in the empire! We have had enough of this disgrace to the country. Go to the G.Q.G. of our Czar and tell him to put an end to this infamous state of affairs!" Sturmer, who had just allowed Rumania to be smashed by the German horde, shrugged his shoulders when he heard this! Sturmer, the traitor who had himself loosed the Germans on the Galician front.

Touch Rasputin, his protector, his master: how can any one who knows anything of Russia dream of such an absurdity?

But the Duma almost unanimously, from the Labour Party to the Conservatives, the Octobrists and the Cadets, rose in a fury and acclaimed the courageous accuser.

Pourichkievitch, who is proverbial throughout Russia for his bravery and whose sincerity is admitted even by his greatest political enemies, approached

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the table where Rasputin was holding forth.

"Enjoy yourself, Gricha, have a good time," he sneered; "it won't be for long."

Taken by surprise, the pseudo-monk nevertheless wished to impress the people around him.

"Yes, I am having a good time, and I advise you to do the same, as I somehow imagine that yours will be even shorter than mine."

But Pourichkievitch continued, looking the ex-carrier stright in the face.

"Don't stint yourself in pleasure and orgies, you monstrous 'Innovator'; death is near, and a man will soon be found to rid Russia of your hideous presence."

Then the member, taking no further notice of his adversary, seated himself at the table close by. Rasputin ceased laughing. He was evidently disturbed.

"I know a place in Kholokiviaia," he said suddenly, "where we will be received with open arms. Come with me, my friends."

He left with his followers. There were now only two tables occupied—the Grand Duke's and the member of the Duma's.

Then Prince Youssoupoff, Count of Soumarok-Elston, a young fellow about twenty-three, married to Princess Irene, a daughter of the Grand Duchess Xenia, sister of Nicolas the Second, approached Pourichkievitch.

"I have listened to you with delight," he said

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softly, holding out his hand. " Allow me to thank you in all our names for the brave things you have said."

" I thank you, Prince. "

" You have expressed the wish that a man would soon be found to suppress this repugnant person. With your consent I will be that man ! "

As Pourichkievitch was too much surprised to answer, the Grand Duke Pavlovitch, who had followed his friend Youssoupoff, continued :

" And I will help you to my utmost, on my honour. We have borne with this moujik long enough. Let us swear for the dignity and the glory of Russia and the Empire to do away with Rasputin ! "

And in this big dining hall of the restaurant, where by chance they were now entirely alone, the terrible oath was taken.

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CHAPTER XVI

The Murder of Rasputin

WE are now at the 15th of December, 1916, Russian style, about ten o'clock on Friday night, in the pretty little house belonging to Prince Youssoupoff.

It has been snowing all day. The ground is covered. The sky is gloomy.

The *gardavoie* are walking up and down in a melancholy manner. At times, a sleigh or an automobile passes, preventing any noise being heard.

It is an ideal night for a crime.

There are five men and a woman in the drawing-room on the first floor of the Prince's house—the Prince himself, the Grand Duke Dimitri Pavlovitch, Pourichkievitch, the brother of S——, and Karali, the pretty dancer, whose acquaintance has been made in a preceding chapter, and who had arrived that very morning from Moscow, where she had been dancing for the wounded soldiers.

"Do you think *he* will come?" the Grand Duke asked of Youssoupoff.

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"I am nearly certain he will. I have not been one of his best friends during this last fortnight for nothing."

The Grand Duke smiled sadly.

"My boy, what a horrid thing we have made you do!"

"Bah! What does that matter?"

But Pourichkievitch cannot conceal his uneasiness.

"You will see he will not come! At the last moment he will realize that we are lying in wait for him and we shall see nothing of him."

Youssoupoff shrugged his shoulders.

"Have confidence, my friends! I have promised this monster a wonderful night's pleasure, and he is not the man to resist it."

"So much the better!" exclaimed Pourichkievitch.

"For the honour of our Czar and the future of our Holy Russia this wretch must disappear! If we were not careful, he would hurl us all into the arms of Germany, or have us all exiled. The Empress sees only through his eyes, and the Czar is so weak. . . ."

Prince Youssoupoff's house stands in the midst of a large garden and extends from the Moskaia to the Offizerskaia. The principal entrance is in the Moskaia. But there is a special door opening on the Offizerskaia, reserved for private visits and the servants, near the little pavilion where the

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Youssoupoff family dispose of their celebrated Crimean wine. Rasputin is to enter by this door.

He particularly wished his visit to Youssoupoff to pass unnoticed. He knows he is watched and criticized and avoids giving his enemies the opportunity of attacking him. It is eleven o'clock at night. Rasputin is late. The conspirators are becoming uneasy. It is quite dark in the drawing-room where they are assembled. The monk must not have the slightest suspicion. If he were to see lights through the curtains on the first floor, he would certainly refuse to enter the house, as it is Youssoupoff alone—and a lady who is to arrive at midnight—whom Rasputin comes to see in this mysterious manner.

Twenty minutes past eleven!

An automobile stops at the door in the Offizerskaia.

A man in a long blue fox coat alights. He rings. Prince Youssoupoff lets him in, as the servants are all away on this night.

"Come in and fear nothing. We are alone. . . ."

Rasputin removes his goloshes in the hall.

"Where are you taking me?" he asks his host.

"To the dining-room. We shall be less disturbed there," answers Prince Youssoupoff. "And I have had a few bottles of wine brought up to help us pass the time until the Princess arrives."

There are three steps leading to the dining-room on the ground floor.

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Two bottles of red wine are on the table. One decanted, contains a strong dose of cyanide of potassium; the same drug has been introduced into the appetizing-looking biscuits on a silver dish. The poison seems infallible; it has, in fact, been tried, barely two hours ago, on Pourichkievitch's hound: the poor beast died instantaneously and is still lying in the garden beneath a tree.

"What will you drink?" asks Prince Youssoupoff, with a smile, handing him the decanter.

Rasputin, after a moment's hesitation, answers:

"Nothing for the present. I'm not thirsty."

The two men talk spiritualism, as Rasputin likes to be considered supernatural and in daily contact with the departed.

"My dear Gregory, could not you initiate me into this wonderful science and show me how to turn tables and talk to ghosts?"

With a satisfied smile the Chief answers:

"Did I not show all these things to Protopopoff? One of the most stupid individuals I ever met! And Dobrovolsky, who has a reputation of being a clever man, did not I teach him enough to enable him to evoke Peter the Great last night in his own ministerial room. Unfortunately the most admirable of our Czars said some nasty things to him."

"What did he say?"

"That if he were still alive he would have him flogged for dishonesty. I repeated this to Sturmer this morning," said the "Innovator" laughing,

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"and the poor old chap looked as if he already heard the whisk of the knout!"

"You must teach me; my wife and I are dying to know."

"I will if you like," said the ex-carrier condescendingly.

But Youssoupoff begins to get thirsty. He takes up one of the bottles—the inoffensive one, of course—pours out a glassful and drinks it off.

"I will take a little," then says Rasputin.

They continue talking. The monk soon finishes the bottle. Occasionally he takes a biscuit, and no doubt finding them to his taste, eats a number of them. But biscuits make one thirsty, and Rasputin, forgetting to be prudent, takes up the poisoned bottle and helps himself.

His host, facing him, looks on pale and breathless.

Has the last moment come for this man who has lived such a life of infamy, committed so many crimes? Evidently not! Rasputin continues to eat the biscuits without feeling the slightest inconvenience from the cyanide of potassium.

Then Youssoupoff becomes terrified.

He is seized with the mystic feeling that is in every Slav. Is it not supernatural that a man can absorb the most violent of poisons without its having any effect on him? Is he really protected by the Lord?

And making some excuse or other the Prince leaves his guest and rushes up to the drawing-room.

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" He won't die ! " he says in an anxious whisper.

" You are joking," sneers one of the conspirators. " Take this revolver and use it ; you will see if Rasputin is as impervious to bullets as to cyanide ! "

Youssoupoff regained courage. He took the revolver with his left hand, hid it behind his back, went downstairs, opened the dining-room door *with his right hand* and perceived the monk in an agitated condition, his face covered with perspiration. He was walking up and down the room, groaning and hiccoughing terribly.

" What is the matter ? "

" I don't feel well," answered Rasputin frowning. " Your wine is good, but it does not seem to agree with me."

" Don't be uneasy, you will feel better presently. Don't think about it, and come and look at this magnificent work of art I know you will admire."

Saying this, with the hand that was free, Youssoupoff pointed to a very fine Christ in ivory on a consol table. Rasputin drew near.

He pretended to be a connoisseur. He had some splendid icons at home, gifts of aristocratic ladies, and some jewels he says the Empress gave him.

The two men, side by side, examined the *chef-d'œuvre.*

But the Prince, as he bent forward, managed to pass the revolver from his left to his right hand and without attracting Rasputin's attention points the weapon to the man's heart.

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He fires twice.

Rasputin falls like a mass. The murderer places his hand upon him to make sure he is not armed and runs to tell his friends.

"This time he is really dead!" They congratulate him, they congratulate each other. The Grand Duke Dimitri offers to go home—he lives quite near—to fetch his automobile and take the body to the Neva where the conspirators had arranged to throw it. . .

* * * * *

Dimitri has gone.

Youssoupoff, Pourichkievitch, the brother of S—— and the dancer K. are mad with joy, proud to be delivered of this monster, a deliverance that will regenerate Russia. When suddenly a heavy step is heard on the ground floor.

"Who is there?" cries Pourichkievitch.

He bends over the banisters. There, in the vestibule, he sees a horrible sight. Covered with blood, as white as a ghost, the monk has mounted the three stairs, has put on his goloshes, and managed to open the street door and get into the garden.

Pourichkievitch, perfectly composed, pulls out his revolver and follows his victim, while Youssoupoff takes an enormous club that hangs on the wall.

Rasputin hurries, as fast as his strength allows him, towards the door that leads to the Offizerskaia. Every step he takes is marked by drops of blood on the snow.

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He is nearing the door; he has reached it. At this moment Pourichkievitch fires three shots, and he falls once more. Youssoupoff strikes him on the head with his club.

This time it is all over. . . .

The last shots have been heard by the police, whom the monk had told to keep watch. They come to the door, demand admittance, and seeing the body are horrified when they recognize Rasputin. . .

" I killed that man," said Pourichkievitch calmly. " It is not a crime but a punishment inflicted on an enemy of the country. Here is my card. I am a member of the Duma."

The police retire hurriedly, either to make their report, or that the quality of the murder impresses them, or that the identity of the victim has made them lose their wits.

Five minutes later the Grand Duke Dimitri Pavlovitch returns.

The driver of the automobile is Dr. Stanislas Stanislavovitch L——, a personal friend of Pourichkievitch. Dimitri found him at home and he joyfully accepted a part in the drama.

The Grand Duke is also accompanied by one of his orderlies, Ivan F——, devotedly attached to him.

They place the body in the car and all take their seats.

It is two o'clock in the morning.

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The doctor-chauffeur drives full speed towards the Petrovsky Bridge.

The car stops between the second and third arches. Rasputin's body is dragged out by Dr. Stanislas L—— and the soldier Ivan F——, one holding the legs, the other the shoulders.

With an effort the two men raise Rasputin and rest him against the balustrade, but to their horror they find the monk is still alive, and with his right hand he grasps the soldier's epaulette and has strength enough to tear it off. One last push . . . and the body dashes against the pillar, rebounds, falls on a block of ice in the Neva, totters, topples over, and is finally lost in the tide.

Justice is done!

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EPILOGUE

RASPUTIN is dead! The Czarina Alexandra Feodorovna, under a weight of grief that makes her lose the exact notion of her duties and her position, sends a message to the Czar at the G.Q.G. at Mohileff, begging him to punish the murderer of the "Holy Man."

Nicolas, as weak and credulous as the Empress herself, orders a rigorous inquiry to be made to discover the guilty party, and all the details of the affair are soon known to the public.

It is impossible to incriminate Pourichkievitch, as the smallest attack on a member of the Duma in the present state of things might have dangerous results. But the Grand Duke Dimitri Pavlovitch and Prince Youssoupoff, who are not covered by parliamentary immunity, must bear the brunt.

Alexandra Feodorovna is merciless and demands their imprisonment, perhaps even their death. But the Czar hesitates before taking such a grave decision.

"Let them be exiled," he orders to Protopopoff, the renegade Liberal, who after having been the partisan of liberty and patriotism has become the

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abject servant of the Court and an accomplice in all acts of treachery.

The Grand Duke Paul, Dimitri's father, appeals to his nephew Nicolas, but without avail. Rasputin's murder is considered as an attempt against the throne itself, and the Czar refuses his pardon.

After all, perhaps the Emperor was not wrong in thinking that the blow that struck the impostor hit the Muscovite Crown at the same time, because it can safely be said that the death of Rasputin was the beginning of the Revolution.

Nevertheless, this was not in the mind of the murderers. They acted without any thought of doctrines or personal ambition. They may even have been convinced that their deed would always be anonymous, for it was the shots fired by Pourichkievitch that revealed the truth. If the police had not been near, it is probable that even to-day a portion of the public in Russia would still persist in the belief that the monk had retired to a monastery whence he would soon return.

Rasputin is dead!

His body was dragged from the Neva and taken to Pokrovskoie. The post-mortem showed that there were three mortal wounds: one in the occiput, another in the loins, the third in the heart.

In the first days of the Revolution the public exhumed these abominable remains and threw them to the winds.

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That this dirty little peasant of Pokrovskoie could have risen to such a height and have shaken, in his fall, one of the most powerful thrones in the world, is not one of the least extraordinary events in the history of the present day!

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